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Maggie O'Kane on every woman's nightmare

The Stalker



G2 with European weather

Society

The eco-warriors of Newbury

G2 pages 10/11

Maureen Freely on the agonies of being 13

Teen Spirit



Parents G2 pages 12/13

New row over hypocrisy attacks

Major's claims fail test

Michael White
Political Editor

JOHN MAJOR yesterday overreached himself in his campaign to paint Labour as the party of hypocrisy and betrayal, when a string of policy claims covering crime, education and the economy fell victim to instant expert refutation.

Though Downing Street aides later qualified significantly what he had said during heated exchanges at Prime Minister's Question Time, Mr Major's assertion that "crime is falling for the first time in 40 years" under his government was described as "factually inaccurate" by criminologists — and contradicted by the Home Office's own figures.

The series of inaccuracies which have dogged Question Time look set to rise to new heights as the election campaign develops.

Blunders

Mr Major: "Crime is falling for the first time in 40 years. Statistics show that quite clearly across the range of crimes."

Fact: The annual recorded crime figures have fallen on numerous occasions since 1955, including in 1977, 1978, 1983, 1988, 1993 and 1994.

Mr Major: "Between 1989/90 and 1994/95, university funding rose by 23 per cent above inflation."

Fact: The number of students rose in those years by over 45 per cent. Funding per student decreased by 25 per cent.

Mr Major: "I defy you to find any western economy that can match the current economic performance of this country."

Fact: Britain's growth last year was 1.8 per cent; at least seven European Union states grew faster than the UK last year, according to the Economist. Italy grew by nearly 3.4 per cent.

Mr Major last week: "There are more than 50,000 more nurses and 4,000 more midwives today than when the Government took office."

Fact: In 1994 there were 238,780 qualified nurses and midwives, compared with 204,810 in 1979. But there were 398,600 NHS nurses, including unqualified and midwifery staff, in 1989 — before the NHS changes — falling to 361,460 in 1993.

university rose by over 45 per cent. So funding per student decreased by 25 per cent.

A third disputed assertion, which the Prime Minister again made yesterday, was about the relative economic performance of Britain in recent years.

In fact, figures published in this week's Economist suggest that Britain's 1.8 per cent growth in the year December was below the latest — slightly older — figures from European Union states, including Belgium (2.7), Denmark (2.6), France (2.0), Holland (2.3), Italy (3.4), Spain (2.9) and Sweden (2.2).

Unemployment figures are more favourable to the Government's case. Several key EU economies are now slipping towards a recession, in contrast to Britain.

Mr Major's regular claim, to the fury of Opposition MPs, that inflation has risen, mortgage costs and inflation are at 50-year low levels also begs vital questions. The real level of interest rates remains historically high once low levels of inflation have been discounted, and the overall percentage of national income taken by all forms of tax is currently higher than in 1979.

What Disraeli once called "lies, damned lies and statistics" are a constant temptation to politicians. A persistent feature of Mr Major's difficulty is his failure to qualify his claims in ways that render them technically correct.

Mr Blair had claimed there were 50,000 fewer nurses and 18,000 more midwives since the NHS reforms of 1989-90. Department of Health figures can justify both claims.

What he omitted to say was that between 1989-90 and 1994-95, the number of students at



Firefighters at Venice's La Fenice opera house have failed to save the 304-year-old jewel that is one of Italy's greatest artistic institutions, but prevented the inferno from spreading in a city built with very little stone and which has no fire hydrants. Report and more pictures, page 3

Killing raises fears of republican feud



Gino Gallagher... shot while collecting benefit

FEAR that a bloody feud within a republican splinter group is about to break out again rose in Belfast last night following the murder of the reputed leader of the Irish National Liberation Army.

Gino Gallagher, named by security and republican sources as having been INLA chief-of-staff for less than nine months, was shot several times at point-blank range as he collected his social security benefit in a DSS office on the Falls Road in West Belfast.

The gunman walked calmly out of the building after the attack.

While Mr Gallagher, who was 32, had many enemies, the INLA is working on the theory that he was killed by dissenting former comrades within the INLA who were "getting their retaliation in first."

The party denied there was any internal feud, but admitted that the victim was an INLA "staff officer."

A statement described him as "a tireless fighter in the revolutionary struggle for national liberation and socialism... his quiet unassuming manner disguised the fearlessness which epitomised the way in which he engaged the enemy."

The killing cast a shadow on fresh political efforts to reduce tension between London and the nationalist community over plans to hold elections in Northern Ireland, and led to renewed calls for the decommissioning of illegal weapons as part of the peace process.

Fears that further killings will follow were fuelled by the statement, which said:

"Those who committed this deed will be uncovered and tracked down."

The SDLP MP for West Belfast, Joe Hendron, said that from what he knew the killing had nothing to do with the IRA and was not a breach of their ceasefire.

"Whether it is part of a feud or not, I am not in a position to say. What worries me is that it may Turn to page 2, column 3

Confrontation avoided, page 4

Coma rape victim pregnant

Ian Katz in New York

EVEN in a country accustomed to daily diet of criminal grotesqueries, the rape of a woman aged 29 who has been in a coma for 10 years has been met with horror and incredulity.

The reaction of the woman's parents has shocked the United States almost as much as the crime itself: they have refused to abort the resulting pregnancy on religious grounds.

The case has sparked a debate among doctors and medical ethicists about what rights can be ascribed to the woman, whose identity has been withheld, the foetus, and the family.

Hanson to be broken up

Roger Cowie

HANSON, the industrial conglomerate which symbolised the aggressive takeover approach of the 1980s, announced yesterday that it was splitting itself up.

The £11 billion break-up will be completed in time for Lord Hanson's retirement in 1997. It comes less than a year after the death of his partner, Lord White, the buccaneering socialist. It will mark the end of an era for industry as the fashion for focusing on a small range of activities replaces the fashion for diversified conglomerates.

Lord Hanson said yesterday: "We are making this exciting and radical move to create even greater management and growth opportunities for these four major businesses, which will become substantial public companies in their own right."

The move met with a muted reaction in the City, where it was seen as an inevitable attempt to reverse a lengthy decline. Hanson shares rose by 7p, adding more than £50 million to the group's stock market value, but one observer commented: "Hanson has reached the end of the road. It's been a 30-year success story and they are unable to progress any further."

Hanson split

Chemicals	Chairman: Lord Hanson
Imperial	Chairman: Derek Bonham
Energy	Chairman: Derek Bonham
Hanson	Chairman: Lord Hanson

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Sketch

A waste land fit for the bunny



Simon Hogart

HAVE a new ritual on week-day evenings. At 10.30 I catch the start of Newsnight, up to the bit where Jeremy Paxman says: "In the studio to discuss this we have two prominent backbench MPs..."

First night

Stand-up stint without climax

Robin Yates

Mark Lamarr

OCASIONALLY, Mark Lamarr's mouth runs away from him. "What sort of crap am I on about?" he asks, as bemused as his audience.

probably formed by those who saw his stint as presenter of The Word. However, as a stand-up, he has always been easy to warm to on a circuit, when the blindest aside can be rehearsed, his improvised riffs — bolstered by prepared routines — leave him unusually vulnerable.

Eight in 10 could become involved, police chief warns □ Services ignoring the problem, says report

Drugs fear for under-11s

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent

EIGHT out of 10 children now being born will have experience of drugs by the time they leave junior school if urgent action is not taken to tackle present trends, a senior policeman warned yesterday.

the fast-growing problem of drug misuse by children and young people. It concludes that use of, and experimentation with, drugs and alcohol is now so widespread among the young "that this behaviour cannot be justifiably described as abnormal".

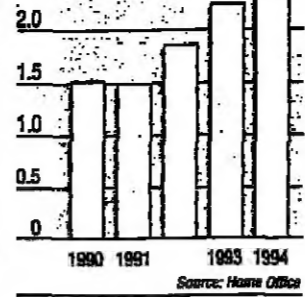


Keith Hellawell: action call

to the local [children's] homes where they have a bath and are out again prostituting themselves for more crack.

Young addicts

Number of new drug addicts aged 21 years and under notified to the Home Office. Thousands.



Children now being born "will have been involved in drugs in one form or another by the time they are 10 or 11".

MoD bows to war syndrome pressure



Sarah Whitehead with her son Ben... "We are not asking for mega amounts of money, just for an answer"

PHOTOGRAPH: HEATH BRETT

David Fairhall

Defence Correspondent

THE Ministry of Defence has launched fresh research into the mysterious Gulf war syndrome, bowing to pressure from veterans who fear it may be causing deformities in their children.

complain of include chronic weakness, depression and loss of memory. The main suspected cause is interaction between the cocktail of vaccinations and anti-nerve gas tablets (NAPS) given to troops who served in the desert campaign.

change its approach by public criticism and the threat of veterans' legal action. "This is not a U-turn", he told the Guardian.

limbs, identified by lawyers seeking compensation for them. Its latest initiative is the outcome of a meeting last week with seven eminent medical specialists called in to validate the work so far and suggest a way forward.

Admiral Tony Revell, said that if another war were to break out with the same threat of chemical and biological attacks, the armed forces would feel obliged to offer the same vaccinations and anti-nerve gas treatments as in 1991.

Belfast killing raises fears of republican feud

Continued from page 1 spark off another spate of killings within one of the other republican organisations, and I hope that all the good people of this area will use their influence on any members of other republican organisations to make sure there are no fit-for-fist killings."

commissioning of illegal weapons". Mr Gallagher was national organiser of INLA's political wing, the Irish Republican Socialist Party, a group dedicated to the expulsion of British troops from Ireland and the establishment of a 32-county Marxist republic.

the Europa Hotel in Belfast. After a long spell of relative inactivity, the IRSP has been reinvigorated by Sinn Féin's participation in the peace process, accusing the IRA's political wing of selling out on fundamental republican principles.

Force members on the Shankill Road. Loyalist witnesses to the attack claim that Mr Gallagher took part.

Mr Gallagher, who took over his own defence, was said to have been furious at the statement. Two weeks ago Mr Torney and a number of his co-accused failed to honour their bail conditions and did not appear at a remand hearing.

'The doctors said it was just one of those things'

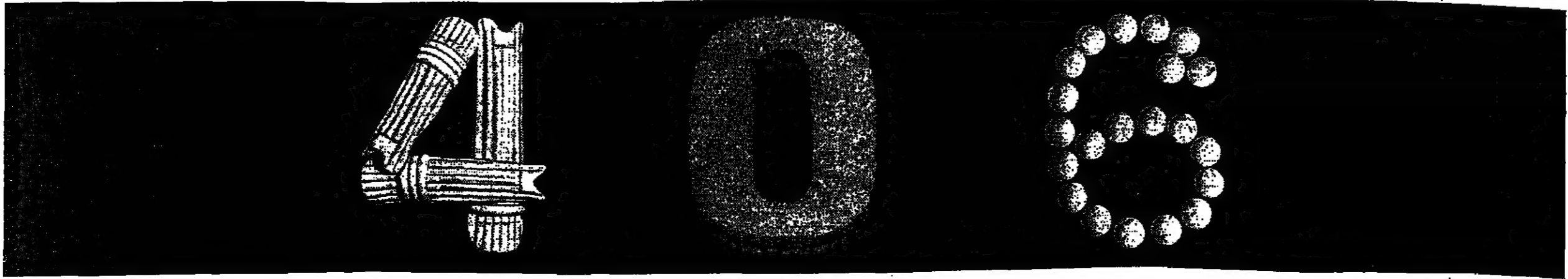
Sally Weale

AS SOON as Ben Whitehead was born, it was evident something was wrong. Not that his parents had been expecting problems. The pregnancy had been perfectly normal and all the scans were clear.

Ben is one of about 70 cases so far registered of children of Gulf veterans born with unexplained deformities, including heart defects, malformed limbs and missing organs. If Britain follows the pattern of the US, more cases are likely to emerge.

Ms Whitehead, aged 30, of Shanklin, Isle of Wight, is convinced there is a link between her son's condition and the cocktail of tablets and injections her husband took to protect him against chemical attack by the Iraqis.

Yesterday she welcomed news that the Ministry of Defence was at last taking action, but said she would prefer to see an independent inquiry. "My husband signed up to go off to war. That was his job. But our child didn't sign up to anything."

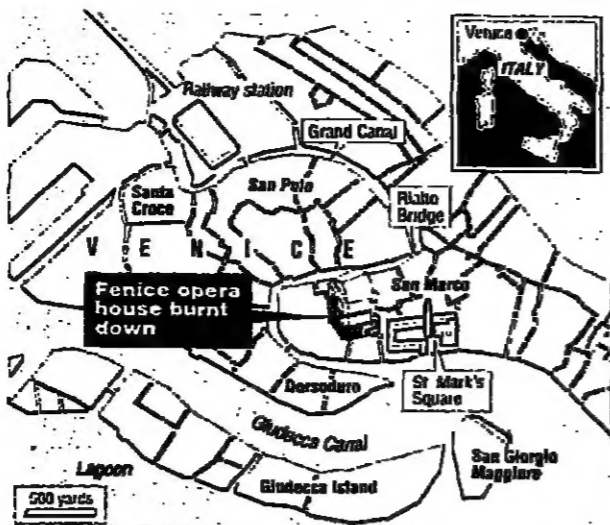


صحة من الامم

Opinion

11s

Opera fire crews saved Venice from even greater tragedy, says mayor



The shell of Venice's La Fenice opera house, above, after the blaze which tore through its all-wooden interior, below

Blaze reveals great risk to 'city of wood'

John Hooper in Rome

FIREFIGHTERS who raced to the blaze which reduced La Fenice opera house to a smouldering heap...

Yet, according to Giampiero Zucchetto, a fire prevention expert at the Italian environment ministry...

"The city is not equipped with a network of hydrants, so water - salt water, what is more - has to be taken from the canals each time a fire has to be put out...

Venice's leftwing mayor, Massimo Cacciari, said that the fire brigade had trained hoses on the blaze within 20 minutes of it being detected...



their motor launches. Water had to be pumped from the Grand Canal and raised from the Venice lagoon by helicopter to douse the flames that leapt 150ft into the night sky...

opera workers' union, said that, by law, a caretaker and two firefighters should have been on the premises all night...

house rebuilding ranged from 300 to 600 billion lire. Federico Mayor, head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation...

Shops warned over 'poor' warranties

Cliff Jones

Retailers who sell extended warranties have been warned that they must sign a code of practice if they are to avoid 'effective action' from the Office of Fair Trading...

John Bridgeman, Director General of Fair Trading, said the reluctance of many traders to display prices suggested 'they recognise very well that the prices of most warranties represent poor value for money'...

Extended warranties are sold by shop staff. The OFT says that policies are oversold and highly priced compared to the actual costs of repairing the goods...

Table titled 'TV guarantee' showing prices for five-year extended warranties for £450 televisions from various retailers like Currys, Dixons, Comet, etc.

most expensive policy cost £240 and the manufacturer's extended warranty cost £134. Electrical goods are much more likely to fall within one year of purchase than they are in years two to five...

The OFT is also calling for measures to grant customers a cooling-off period in which to consider the benefits of warranties. Customers would be able to compare the prices of different policies before they pay for a warranty...

Taped royal call on hold

Paper warns it might publish duke's 'sensitive' comments

Edward Pilkington

BUCKINGHAM Palace last night faced the prospect of further damaging press coverage after a tabloid newspaper reserved the right to publish 'politically embarrassing' extracts of a tape recording...

Edward Pilkington, the newspaper's editor, Stuart Higgins, said publication at a later date 'could be in the public interest'.

Alides take the view that any response would inadvertently add credence to the story. If hints dropped yesterday by the Sun are to be believed, the palace could have reason to be fearful...

Nightmare stalking great theatres

Venice's La Fenice is the latest great opera house to fall to the flames in the past few decades, writes Martin Kettle

VENICE'S famous opera house, the Teatro La Fenice, which Dame Joan Sutherland has called the most beautiful in the world, lies in ashes this morning...

destroyed by an arsonist in 1997. And the Cairo opera house where Verdi's Aida was premiered in 1874, burned to the ground in 1971.

Richard Wagner once proposed to build an opera house which would be deliberately ignited once the performance was over.

ice because the censorship was less strict than elsewhere in Italy. Verdi wrote five operas for the Fenice: Ernani, Attila, Rigoletto, La Traviata and Simon Boccanegra.

"If we cannot save Stonehenge from the Department of Transport, then nothing is safe. It is a symbol of British heritage and we would be letting down our predecessors who fought so hard to buy the land." Paul Brown talks to the new boss of the National Trust

Large advertisement for Mercantile Credit featuring a telephone handset, the text 'NEED A LOAN? USE YOUR PLASTIC.', and contact information for a fast loan service at 0800 111 777.

4 BRITAIN

News in brief

Jeweller guilty of gold VAT plot

A JEWELLER said to have been involved in a £20 million gold smuggling operation with a woman police constable was yesterday found guilty of conspiring to evade VAT on the importation of bullion.

Eggar to quit as MP

THE energy minister, Tim Eggar, announced yesterday that he will not be fighting the next general election, the 52nd Conservative MP and second minister to do so.

Newbury camp removed

THE Highways Agency yesterday removed the first protest camp from the route of the Newbury bypass.

Murder case boy remanded

A 16-YEAR-OLD boy was remanded in custody yesterday charged with the murder of pensioner Douglas Holman, 72, the retired nurse found dying in the front room of his home in Camborne, Cornwall last weekend.

Whales' burial delayed

CONTRACTORS disposing of six whales which died after becoming stranded on a North Sea beach ran into problems yesterday when water started to fill the burial pits for the 25ft, 10 tonne mammals at Cruden Bay, near Peterhead in Grampian.

BMA backs 'leak' curb

THE British Medical Association yesterday backed a bill to bring in legal penalties for health staff who leak confidential information about patients.

Women's '£1m damage' to jet

THREE women protesters caused damage of around £1 million to a Hawk jet trainer after breaking into a British Aerospace military aircraft factory, a court heard yesterday.

Firms warned on RSI

COMPANIES must take prevention of repetitive strain injury (RSI) more seriously after a record £2.000 payout to a former inland Revenue typist, an expert said yesterday.

Student on murder charge

DETECTIVES last night charged a 19-year-old college student with the rape and murder of schoolgirl Claire Hood more than a year ago.

TV role for Hurd

FORMER foreign secretary Douglas Hurd is to turn television presenter for a four-part BBC documentary series examining attempts over the last two centuries to secure world peace.



The house on the seafront in Sunderland where the body of David Hanson was found, and (right) the allotments where David Grieff's body was discovered

Man 'killed youths to keep gay secret'

Crimes were undetected at first because method of strangling left no marks on bodies, says QC

Martin Walker writes

SADISM and fear of revealing his homosexuality prompted a man to murder three youths and attempt to burn their bodies, a court heard yesterday.



Thomas Kelly: 'meeting with Grievson'



David Hanson: fingerprint clue at house



David Grieff: DNA test 'provided link'

The true cause of death and that it had not been truly ascertained. They held a meeting with Detective Superintendent Dave Wilson, who was leading the investigation, and second pathological opinions were commissioned.

A belt had been used to strangle the youths, so rapidly that no signs of injury were left on their necks. The similarities between the cases were so striking that it was concluded that they must have been the work of one man.

Three victims by circumstantial evidence: a known meeting with Kelly and Grieff a few hours before their deaths, and a fingerprint on a window in the burned-out house where Hanson's body was found.

which caused Grievson to "lose his composure and become fidgety with his eyes beginning to fill with tears". Mr Milford said that in the spring of 1994 Grievson allegedly told a prison cellmate that he had killed someone and set fire to the body after having sex with him.

Nigerians can stay as tribunal defies Howard

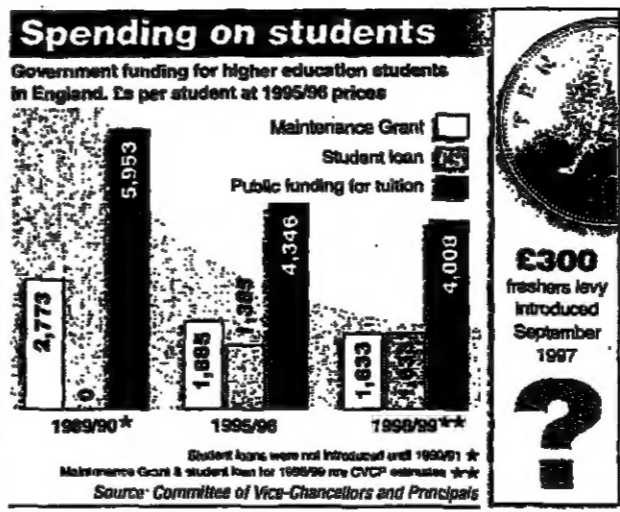
Erlend Clouston

A LAWYER yesterday demanded that the Home Office reassess its view of Nigeria's military regime after an immigration tribunal allowed two appeals against deportation in defiance of government advice.

Vice-chancellors angered by PM's claim of 'no excuse' for student levy

John Carvel Education Editor

UNIVERSITY vice-chancellors were angered by John Major's claim in the Commons yesterday that increases in government funding left them no excuse for charging undergraduates a £200 registration levy.



further private finance in support of capital funding." Committee officials said there was strong support among vice-chancellors for the levy, but it would not go ahead unless there was a decisive majority.

A Special Announcement
A Week on the Nile - 7 nights from £395
Cruise between Aswan and Luxor on board the MS Ra
December 16 £395
December 23 £495
Single cabin £130
Middle deck £45
Upper deck £95
Abu Simbel (by road) £69

Leaders rule out confrontation

Major committed to Dublin role in Northern Ireland settlement

Patrick Wintour and David Sharrock

JOHN Major and the SDLP leader John Hume yesterday appeared to draw back from confrontation over the Northern Ireland peace process after a 90 minute meeting from which both emerged to say they were committed to a comprehensive negotiated settlement.

meeting with Mr Hume after the nationalist leader had last week rejected the Prime Minister's decision to call for an elected body as a route to all-party talks.

refused to join talks with Sinn Fein until the IRA starts de-commissioning arms.

tions to the talks process. We don't envisage an assembly with legislative powers, administrative powers or executive powers.

THE MS RA
The MS Ra is a large Nile cruiser purpose built in Britain accommodating up to 140 passengers. Facilities on board include a restaurant, lounge, bar, sun deck with swimming pool, jacuzzi. All cabins are air conditioned and have private bathrooms.

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Mother in fear defies court order on children

Beatrice Campbell and Sarah Besseley

A WOMAN who is in hiding because of death threats from her violent former husband could be jailed today for refusing to comply with an order to allow him contact with their children.

Ms X, as she prefers to be known, may be held in contempt of court over the order made in Newcastle in December by Judge Crawford. Today's hearing is in front of the same circuit judge in Durham.

Her ex-husband was released from prison late last year after serving four years of a six-year sentence for raping and battering her, following their divorce. He beat her during their marriage and threatened her with guns.

He is subject to a restraining order preventing him from going within 500 yards of his former wife, but he has visited her previous address and social services officers looking for her since his release.

Ms X has refused to give the man's lawyers the address of the children, two boys aged nine and seven, who live with her. She is afraid that if she allows her former husband to talk to the boys, even in the presence of two police officers and a court welfare officer as the order requires, he will get clues to her whereabouts or movements, such as the name of the boys' school.

Women's groups and those involved with women's refuges and rape crisis centres in the North-east have offered support to a growing campaign in defence of Ms X's stand. Sally

Young, chairwoman of Newcastle Women's Issues working group, was concerned that the case highlighted a legal loophole which might allow violent men to track down the wives they battered.

Helena Kennedy, QC, said: "Women develop antennae about the violent men they're dealing with. They know when they and their children are in danger. We have to listen to them."

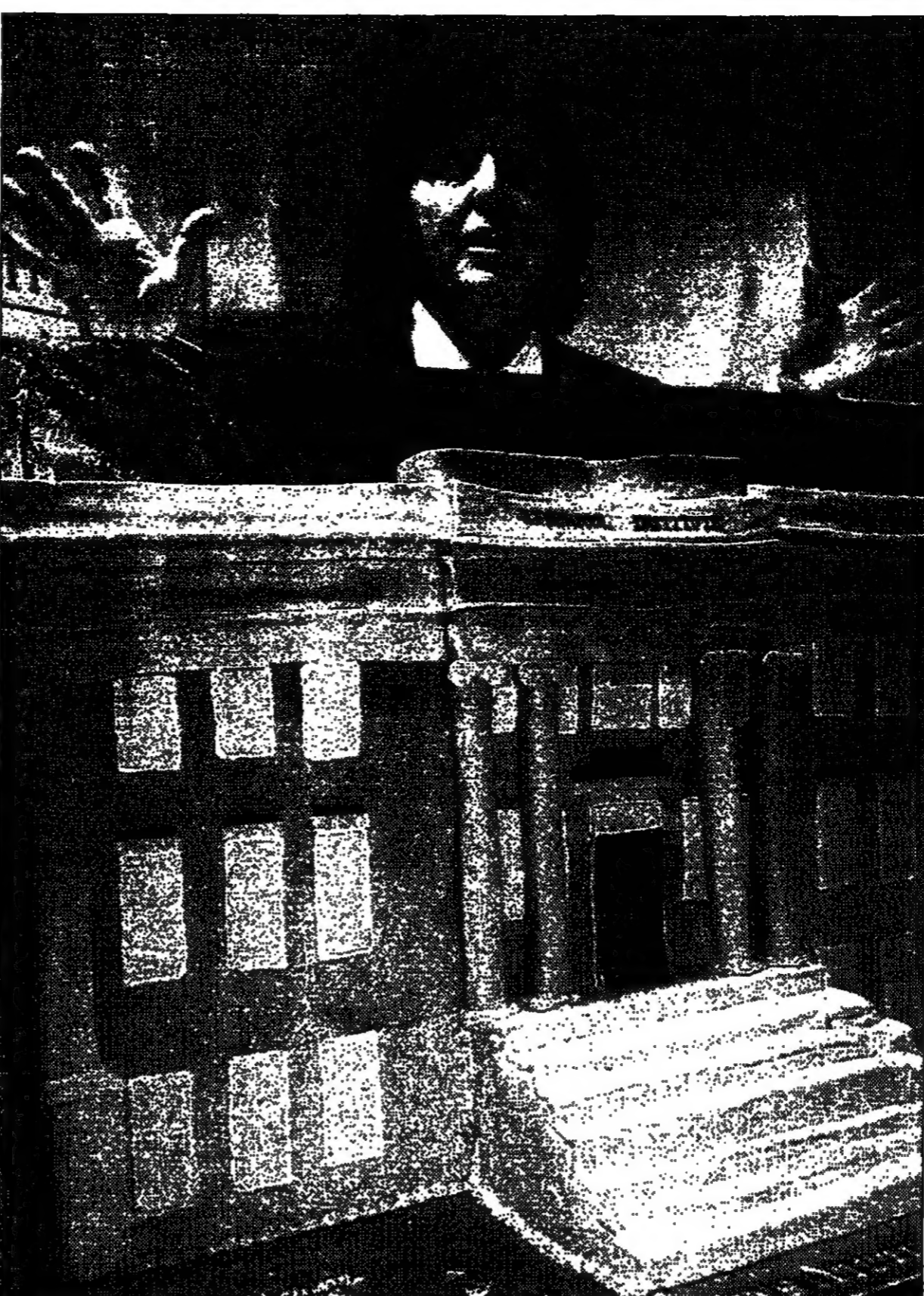
Joanne Wilkins, a friend of Ms X who is co-ordinating the campaign, is trying to set up a support fund, since legal aid is about to run out. She said: "In court she will be in contempt. They will ask her for her address, and she will say no. Last time somebody left it on a legal document and her ex-husband came to find her."

Although Ms X has remarried and has a two-year-old child by her new husband, the former husband refuses to give up his claim to her, said Ms Wilkins. "He sent tapes and letters every day from prison. As far as he is concerned, she is his property to do with as he will."

Ms X said she had not tried to cut her former husband out of her children's lives. "I'm not a mother who is saying the children are not allowed to talk about their father. I've kept photographs of him and cuttings of the stories that appeared in the newspapers for them to ponder over when they're older."

She agreed to his demands to see the children while he was in prison. But when he discovered — from the children — that she was having another baby he suddenly stopped the visits and returned their letters.

Former Beatle unveils performing arts institute at his old school, writes David Ward



McCartney with an inauguration cake model of the Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts. PHOTOGRAPH: DON MCFARLANE

Message from Macca: All you need is fame

THE headline ought to be McCartney in Tribute to Queen, but that would only recreate the confusion momentarily felt by the world's press yesterday at the inauguration of Liverpool's £15 million Fame school of which he is patron — a ceremony distinguished by the brightness of its lights, the volume of its music and the length of its speeches.

Are we talking royalty or Freddie Mercury here?

Ex-Beatle Paul plumped for Her Majesty, not least because she, like him, has made a personal donation to the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts whose first 200 students are now installed in the sumptuously refurbished school he and George Harrison once attended. The 18-year-olds will learn everything from stardom to being a roadie during their three-year degree course.

"People of my generation and the generations before had a great awe for the Queen," reflected Mr McCartney. "Now a lot of that has been stripped away. There's the other side that people laugh at, but in the Queen's case I always think of her as a very sensible person. I'm very glad that she is coming in June for our official opening."

He diplomatically answered a question about students and drugs, quoted Hamlet and hoped LIPA would reach out to students in poor areas. He also pondered the mysteries of artistic creation.

"I'd love to try and talk to a bunch of kids here about songwriting. But if I ever do that, the first thing I'll say is, 'Look, I don't know

Beatle's degree of success

- By the time Paul McCartney was 18, he had:
 - Acquired his first guitar for £15
 - Met John Lennon
 - Joined The Quarrymen
 - Toured Scotland
- By the time he was 21, he had:
 - Signed up with Brian Epstein
 - Co-written Love Me Do
 - Co-written Please Please Me and seen it go to number one
 - Toured Britain and Europe
 - Seen debut album go to number one five weeks before his 21st birthday

Stalker 'broke police camera'

Duncan Campbell Crime Correspondent

CAMBRIDGESHIRE police would not comment last night on suggestions that a stalker who raped a woman had also tampered with the video security equipment provided for her by the police.

The woman was provided with the video equipment after the stalker first attacked her outside her house near Huntingdon on December 17, after following her for several months. He then returned and raped her on January 17. The second attack took place over two hours.

When [the December] attack was reported, a police spokesman said, "a camera was installed at her home as part of a package. The measures met with her agreement."

Cambridgeshire police said on Monday that they were "comfortable" about the security arrangements, but they

have since been heavily criticised by women's groups for failing to provide adequate protection.

After the publication of an artist's impression and a detailed description of the attacker, nearly 100 people contacted Cambridgeshire police yesterday. A spokeswoman said some of the calls suggested who the man might be. All calls would be followed up.

The woman, who is in her thirties and married with children, was first accosted by the man last year. She contacted the police who provided her with the camera and various other security measures, believed to include a panic button.

The National Anti-Stalking and Harassment campaign (Nash) has been critical of the law, which it says gives the police insufficient powers to act against stalkers at an early stage. Another campaign group, Women Against Rape, has called for an inquiry into the case.



A Crumb cartoon from his book My Troubles With Women

Crumb cartoons cleared after 'preposterous' obscenity case

Duncan Campbell Crime Correspondent

THE work of Robert Crumb, one of America's most celebrated cartoonists, was yesterday cleared of all charges of obscenity and passed for sale in the United Kingdom.

In a decision welcomed by comic booksellers and lawyers, Usbridge magistrates in west London ruled that two frames from an 80-page comic book, My Troubles with Women, were not obscene and the book could therefore be sold in this country. Three other adult comic books were also cleared for importation.

Costs of £5,000, seen as remarkably high for a one-day hearing, were awarded to the distributors and importers of the books, Knockabout Comics of west London.

"This is a very good day for underground comics," said Tony Bennett of Knockabout after the verdict. "I'm absolutely delighted."

The decision came after a day-long hearing before three lay magistrates, two male and one female, after an action brought by Customs and Excise under the 1878 Customs Consolidation Act.

Customs had claimed that the book and the Twisted Sisters, should not be sold here.

Knockabout argued that the books were neither pornographic nor obscene, and were widely regarded as works of art.

Crumb — the creator of cartoon characters Fritz the Cat and Mr Natural — was the subject of a well-received sponymous documentary film, directed by Terry Zwigoff, which came out last year. He has enjoyed cult status in the United States and Europe since the 1960s and now lives in France with

his wife and fellow cartoonist Aline Kominsky. Some stories in My Troubles with Women feature both Crumbs, each drawing themselves.

Paul Gravett, administrator of the Cartoon Art Trust, whose president is the Duke of Edinburgh, told the court that Crumb's work was in the tradition of Hogarth and Rowlandson and that he was one of the most important cartoonists of the last 25 years.

William Thompson, of the criminality department of Reading university, and an expert in obscenity laws, also defended Crumb's work, saying he used it in his lectures.

Counsel for Knockabout, Geoffrey Robertson QC, a veteran of obscenity trials involving underground literature, said the action had been "preposterous".

After the verdict, Knock-

about's solicitor, Bill Nash, said: "It amazes me that, in this day and age, art books like this are being seized. It's a very good result."

Mr Bennett said the seizure of the books had cost his firm £25,000 to £30,000 in lost profits. He would not be suing Customs, he said, but hoped that the "climate can now return to normal. It is a very important decision."

My Troubles with Women had previously been sold without any problems in Britain after it was first published here in 1960. A fresh importation of the book in 1995 was seized.

Previously Customs officers had accepted that the comics should not be classified as obscene, but last year this policy suddenly changed. Customs and Excise had no comment last night.

QE2 chief goes with £407,000

Gary Younge on the Cunard executive who took the blame — and a lot of cash

THE former chairman of Cunard, who resigned after he took responsibility for an ill-fated Christmas cruise caused by a bungled refit of the QE2, received a £407,000 pay-off from the company, it emerged yesterday.

John Olsen received compensation of £292,000 for loss of office together with a year's salary of £163,000 as well as £12,000 in allowances and benefits, according to the annual report of Cunard's

parent company, Trafalgar House.

Mr Olsen quit his £508,000 a year job last May following the disastrous cruise in December 1994.

Passengers who paid up to £29,000 to travel on the liner were forced to endure blocked lavatories and leaking cabins. Corridors in the ship were littered with chicken wire as well as building debris. Other passengers were left behind at Southampton because their cabins were not yet ready.

Their inconvenience was due to £20 million worth of incomplete refurbishment.

The chief executive of Trafalgar House at the time said Mr Olsen was "taking responsibility" for the fiasco and was being "let go" two weeks before his rolling contract expired.

The company's offer of ticket refunds, free holidays and compensation to all 600 passengers has done little to quell the bad publicity that has engulfed Cunard since United States coastguards insisted the QE2 could not leave New York on the next leg of the cruise until vital repairs had been carried out.

Trafalgar House had been hoping to bring the matter to an end in November with a \$7.5 million settlement in the US.

But many British passengers who were unhappy about the terms of the settlement, lodged another claim in a British court. They also served a writ on Cunard at the beginning of the month.



John Olsen: quit after QE2's ill-fated Christmas voyage

Row over NHS targets

Health body aiming to remove patients to meet time guarantee

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent

A HEALTH authority yesterday admitted trying to remove patients from hospital waiting lists in order to meet a target of having no body queuing for more than 12 months by the end of March.

Leeds health authority denied it was forcing people off the lists against their will. But a local orthopaedic surgeon claims patients have been "removed" from his care.

John Cruickshank, a spinal specialist at Leeds general infirmary, has said in a letter to patients: "I do not regard this as satisfactory, but I am told that this is how the health service is to run."

The authority's action reflects pressure on the NHS throughout England to clear all waiting lists longer than 12 months.

Ministers have not declared such a formal target, but all

a maximum 12-month wait. In conjunction with the United Leeds Teaching Hospitals trust, which included the general infirmary, cases were being identified where treatment was unlikely before March 31 and where the guarantee would as a result be broken.

In such cases — "about 20-30 at the end of the day" — the patients and GPs were being approached about alternatives including treatment elsewhere or dropping off the waiting list for the time being.

Patients could if they wished remain on the list, Mr Lake insisted. "It is absolutely not true to say that patients have been removed from consultants' lists."

A spokeswoman for the United Leeds trust said Mr Cruickshank was expressing a personal view about patients "removed by the health authority".

Seven in 10 nurses believe staffing levels are too low to provide adequate patient care and one in five says they are "dangerously" low, according to analysis of 400 responses to a questionnaire in Nursing Standard magazine.

Health body aiming to remove patients to meet time guarantee

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Our Mortgage Price Promise means that we will review our rates again on 15 February 1996.

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frontation

War of nerves between Beijing and Taipei grows China defies world on nuclear tests

Andrew Higgins
in Hong Kong

CHINA stood alone against the world yesterday, vowing to press on with underground nuclear blasts in defiance of a test moratorium embraced by Russia, the United States, Britain and, after six tests in the South Pacific, France.

Nuclear weapons, once mocked by Mao Zedong as a "paper tiger", are cherished by the Communist Party leadership in Beijing as a potent source of leverage over Taiwan and a vehicle for China's superpower ambitions.

A foreign ministry statement yesterday announcing China's continued commitment to underground tests coincided with a warning by Li Peng, the prime minister, that Beijing would use force to block any move by Taiwan towards formal independence.

"There is only one China in the world and Taiwan is an inalienable part of it," Mr Li told a rally in the Great Hall of the People overlooking Tiananmen Square.

The speech, marking the first anniversary of stillborn reunification proposals by President Zengtao, was closely scrutinised by diplomats and military experts

after reports that the People's Liberation Army had completed contingency plans for limited military action against Taiwan.

China exploded its first nuclear device in 1964 in the desert at Lop Nor, in the far west region of Xinjiang. It argues that it should be allowed to catch up with more advanced Western nuclear powers.

Beijing has conducted 42 tests, only three fewer than Britain but a tiny fraction of the 1,030 carried out by the US.

The conventional military balance between China and Taiwan is considered fairly even, despite the mainland's 3 million-strong army. But China's possession of nuclear weapons gives it the edge in an escalating war of nerves.

Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a renegade province, flirted with nuclear capability in the 1970s and early 1980s, but closed a plutonium separation plant under pressure from the US.

China is expected to carry out two or three nuclear tests later this year in a programme thought to involve the development of two new ballistic missile systems. It supports the idea of a comprehensive test ban, but says it will only abide by such a pact when it becomes international law.

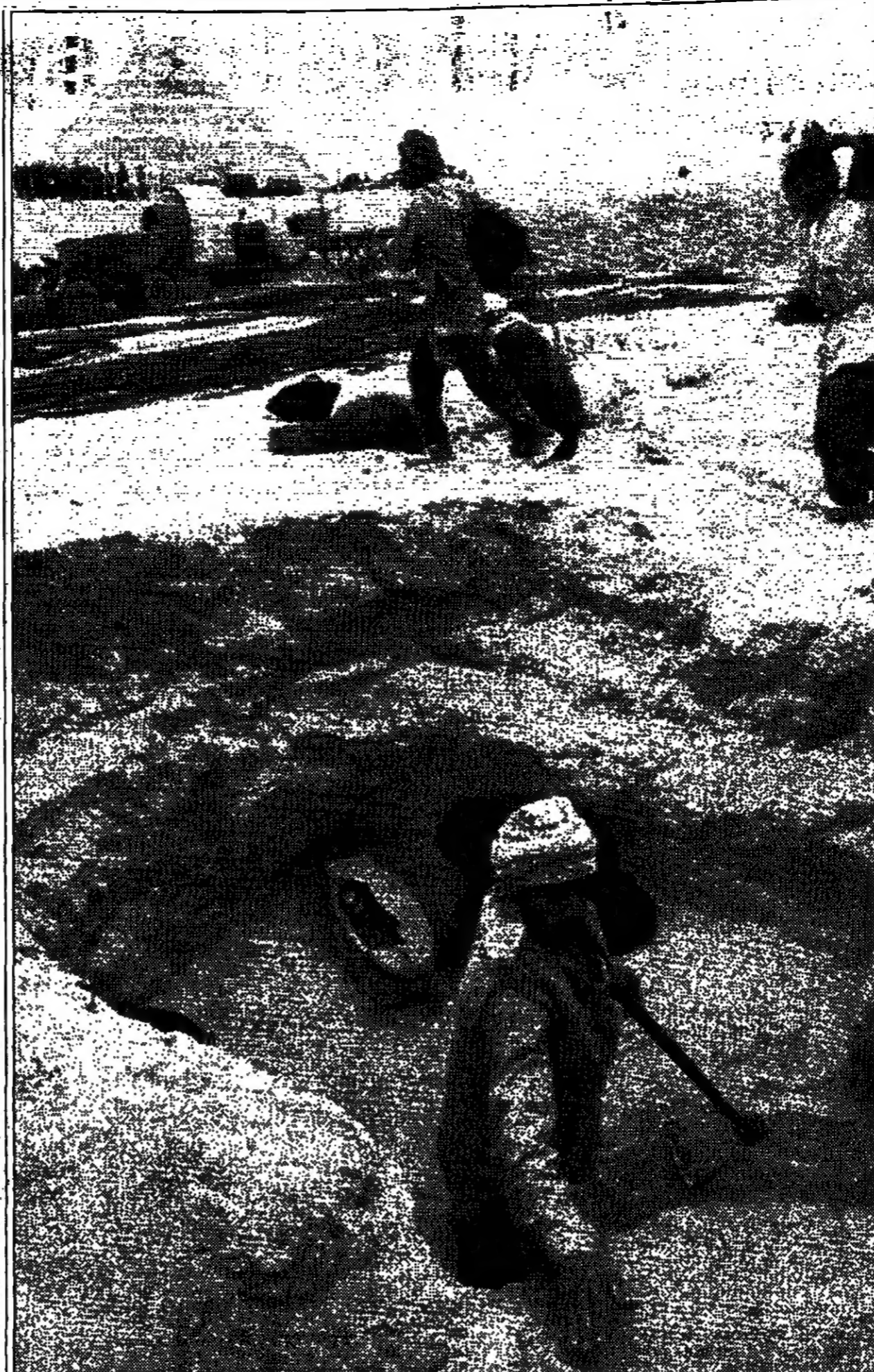
"The position of the Chinese government on nuclear testing is clear-cut and remains unchanged," said Chen Jian, the foreign ministry spokesman. "China has conducted a very limited number of nuclear tests and things will continue to be that way."

China has declined to comment on reports that it could unleash a missile attack on Taiwan, firing one rocket a day for 30 days after the island holds presidential elections in March.

This is Taiwan's first chance to elect a president, a reform that completes its transition from family despotism to democracy, but China sees it as an attempt to entrench a separate political identity.

In a sign of heightened tension, China voiced concern yesterday about the recent passage through the Taiwan strait of the Nimitz, a nuclear-powered US aircraft carrier, and four escort ships. It was the first voyage through the 100-mile strip of sea separating Taiwan from the mainland since 1978, when Washington set up an embassy in Beijing and scrapped a defence treaty with Taipei.

Taiwan's stock market plummeted earlier this week on predictions that Mr Li's speech would spell out a timetable for reunification.



Surprise find... Egyptian workers yesterday uncovered the 2,600-year-old coffin and skeleton of a child on the site of a partly built museum at Saqqara, south of Cairo. The building is being removed because it is on a cemetery and mars the view of Djoser's step pyramid, thought to be the oldest stone building of its size. PHOTOGRAPH BY MOHAMED EL-DARS/AGF

Bandits prefer it with chips

Jonathan Freedland
in Washington

LIKE highwaymen of the electronic age, a new breed of outlaws is terrorising computer tycoons, mounting stick-up raids, not for money but microchips.

They have staged more than 50 hi-tech holdups in the last year, ambushing executives of some of Silicon Valley's leading computer companies.

Hitherto concern about computer crime has centred on hackers breaking into sensitive corporate and even military systems, either for profit or for the sheer thrill of playing havoc. Now old-fashioned robbery is taking over.

Last week Paul Heng, owner of Unigen Corp, a computer component firm in Fremont, California, faced down two armed men who pounced on his car as he was leaving home apparently an attempt to seize valuable technology.

Mr Heng eluded the stick-up artists, driving off as bullets sped past his car. But police believe he was the latest victim of a California crime wave.

Last month another Fremont computer boss was kidnapped on his way home, forced back to his business, and robbed.

The thieves have turned violent chiefly because of the high return on stolen computer parts. Microprocessors and memory chips are most in demand, each one costing hundreds of dollars but weighing less than a penny.

Last Thursday the owner of Microland Electronics in San Jose was shutting up shop when he was ambushed by two gunmen who tied him up and plundered his supplies.

It is estimated that up to \$50 million (\$33 million) has been taken in stick-ups, but that is a mere fraction of the \$8 billion the industry loses annually by theft and employee "skimming".

Meanwhile Kevin Mitnick, the master hacker arrested by the FBI last year, is in the news again. Three books appeared this week telling of Mr Mitnick's battle with the super-sleuth Tsutomu Shimomura.

A film deal has already been signed.

Envoy's home attacked

Suzanne Goldenberg
in New Delhi

GUNMEN in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka fired at the residence of Britain's deputy high commissioner yesterday, an apparent sign that growing public frustration before next month's elections could be redirected towards foreign aid donors.

Diplomats and police said a guard was injured in the early morning attack, in which six shots were fired at the home of Miss M. R. McIntosh.

The High Commission said a live bomb had later been discovered at the house.

Campaigning began a week ago for the February 15 election, prompting fears of escalating violence after 22 months of home-made bomb attacks and protest strikes.

Riot police were called to an election meeting in Dhaka at the weekend after youths torched a police vehicle and threw stones at passing cars.

The main opposition parties are boycotting plans by the governing Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to hold elections. The main challenger, Sheikh Hasina Wazed, has held "anti-election" campaign meetings and said her Awami League will resist the "farce".

Sheikh Hasina and her allies have accused foreign donors, particularly the United States and Britain, of propping up Begum Khaleda Zia's government and urged them to stop supporting the election plan.

On Monday the US state department called on Bangladeshis to allow free elections. Its spokesman Nicholas Burns called on all parties "to avoid

violence, to avoid intimidation, coercion or interference in the right of voters to exercise their rights to vote".

But in nearly a sixth of the constituencies that will not be necessary. Already, 47 BNP candidates, including Begum Khaleda, have been returned unopposed.

The 23-month stand-off between the two women — exacerbated by personal enmity between the heirs to rival political traditions — focuses on the conduct of the elections.

The opposition has demanded that Begum Khaleda step down and hand over power to a caretaker administration, saying the government cannot be trusted to hold a fair vote. Begum Khaleda argues that caretaker regimes are a relic of military dictatorships, whereas her government was elected democratically in 1991.

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Drug lords 'implicate Samper'

Frank Bajak in Bogota

A COMMUNIQUE believed to be from the jailed leaders of the world's biggest cocaine cartel claims that they gave President Ernesto Samper of Colombia millions of dollars during his 1994 election campaign.

The two-page statement received by the newspaper El Tiempo on Monday could spur efforts to force Mr Samper's removal. There are indications that he is considering a deal which would allow him to resign but avoid prosecution.

That would need a pardon from congress, many of whose members, also accused of accepting drug money from the Cali cartel, would be likely to insist on being included in a blanket amnesty, said a leading opposition senator, Eduardo Pizano.

Congress was due to hold a special session yesterday to debate the crisis and accusations against the president.

Mr Samper has insisted that he will leave office only "with my head held high, or dead". But political and judicial sources say he is seeking a way to step down while guaranteeing that Liberal Party loyalists remain in power.

He has been under intense pressure to resign since last week, when his former campaign manager, Fernando Botero, said the president had known all along drug money helped to put him in office.

Leading credibility to the communiqué, a judicial source said on Monday that the jailed leaders of the Cali cartel, Miguel and Gilberto Rodriguez Orejuela, had offered to co-operate with prosecutors investigating the president.

The communiqué was signed "The Extraditables", the name used by the Medellín cocaine cartel before its boss, Pablo Escobar, was killed in December 1993.

The prosecutor-general's office said yesterday it had not received the letter, and did not know if it was authentic. El Tiempo believes it is authentic.

It reads: "Because we have been threatened with extradition in order to keep us quiet behind bars, we have decided to follow the example [of Mr Botero]."

"We want to help save the nation and all the citizens who are being deceived..." Colombian law bars the extradition of its nationals to stand trial abroad. The Rodriguez brothers fear being prosecuted in the United States, where the authorities would like them jailed for life.

When he was arrested in August, Miguel Rodriguez denied that he had given money to Mr Samper's campaign.

Many prominent figures fear for their lives. Andrés Pastrana, who narrowly lost the 1994 election to Mr Samper, was in Miami on

Monday after fleeing Colombia because of death threats.

Mr Samper's lawyer, Antonio José Cancino, resigned on Monday — also because of death threats.

On Sunday Felipe López, the former chief federal prosecutor in Cali, was killed in a Bogotá street.

If Mr Samper fails to secure a resignation deal, the federal prosecutor, Alfonso Valdívieso, is likely to ask congress to open a new investigation into the president, said the judicial source.

In December a congressional committee said there was insufficient evidence to seek Mr Samper's removal, but Mr Valdívieso is expected to present a stronger case.

Two former presidents, Alfonso López Michelsen and César Gaviria, said on Monday that the case should go directly to the senate.

If the senate recommends prosecution, Mr Samper must resign. — AP.

Private jet jeopardises aid to Kenya

James McKinley in Nairobi reports on warped spending priorities that benefit politicians but damage public interest

WHEN President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya flew to Uganda last week for talks with other east African leaders, he travelled in a new private jet bought by taxpayers' money last month for about \$3.5 million.

As the plane took off, it banked over the potholed road from Nairobi to Mombasa, Kenya's main port. Some opposition leaders and diplomats say the plane and the road illustrate what is wrong with the government's economic priorities: a long-standing tendency among politicians to let personal prestige outweigh public interest.

When Mr Moi bought the plane, a Dutch-made Fokker, his government was seeking a \$50 million low interest loan from the World Bank to repair the road. Newspapers revealed the purchase of the plane in November and government officials have argued since then that the expense was justified because Mr Moi

had to take one of Kenya Airways' two planes out of scheduled service every time he travelled.

The plane is one of several expenditures not listed in Kenya's budget which have jeopardised aid from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and donor countries, diplomats and officials at international development banks said.

They said the private plane and two other costly projects were mentioned at talks this month between the government and a joint mission from the World Bank and the IMF. The two sides are trying to hammer out a plan for economic reform that would allow the IMF to release hundreds of millions of dollars in blocked aid.

The stakes are high for Kenya. At risk are \$200 million in direct aid from the IMF and nearly \$165 million in loans from the World Bank for roads and other projects

needed to attract investment. The talks are being watched by Western countries, including the United States, and several have said the IMF's decision will be a yardstick for them. Only a fraction of the \$800 million promised by donor countries in November 1994 has been disbursed, because of the stalled negotiations, diplomats said. Neither the IMF nor the World Bank would comment on the talks.

Sources close to the talks

The population is growing faster than the economy so Kenyans are getting poorer

say the main sticking points have been the government's inability to stamp out corruption and the kind of prestige spending typified by the president's new plane.

The government is also spending about \$85 million to build an international airport at Eldoret, the heart of Mr

Moi's home state in eastern Kenya. Parliament did not approve the project — the money was tucked away in a special debt-service fund in this year's budget. It was also hidden from World Bank auditors scrutinising the budget, until a newspaper reported its existence.

The government says the airport is needed because of an economic boom in the area.

Ironically, the controversies over the airport and the private plane came to light as the economy started to improve.

The government suspended high-ranking port officials on corruption charges earlier this month. Urged by the IMF, it has also eliminated import licences, squeezed the money supply and liberalised trade.

As a result, interest rates are down and the economy grew by 5 per cent in 1995, after several years of stagnation. Inflation, which hit 100 per cent in 1993, stayed below 7 per cent last year.

But local economists say the population is growing faster than the economy. So Kenyans, with an average annual income of \$1,200, are getting poorer. — New York Times.

مكتبة الاميل

Handwritten notes and advertisements on the right margin, including "Alaska chills", "Christen raises", and "Letters,".

Orchestral symbols clash

A discordant note sours German relations with the Czechs, despite efforts to forge new links Ian Traynor reports from Bonn

A DISCORDANT nationalist spat in the orchestra pits of Prague rose to a crescendo yesterday when Gerd Albrecht, the only German ever to be chief conductor of the Czech Philharmonic, offered his resignation, alleging a campaign of persecution, Czech "chauvinism", and political interference.

Prague accuses the Germans of making fresh demands for a rush of property claims by families of the dispossessed, and prefers to refer to the deportations as "forced emigration". The treatment of the expelled Germans was endorsed by the Allied powers at the Potsdam conference and ordered in decrees by President Eduard Benes of Czechoslovakia in 1945.

for the expulsions in 1950, one of the first acts of his presidency. But he, too, insists that the Benes decrees there cannot be retroactively rescinded, because that could bring thousands of German property claims.



Gerd Albrecht: alleges campaign of persecution

News in brief

German scam blows MI6 agent's cover

THE COVER of a female MI6 agent has been blown in the aftermath of an operation that led to one of her contacts in German intelligence being suspended for alleged corruption. Rosemary Sharpe, who worked in the British mission in Berlin, paid more than £20,000 to the German agent for "Sovmat" — spy language for Soviet material. Sovmat in this case was equipment belonging to Russian forces in east Germany.

High-security jail for child

A BOY of 12 who killed a five-year-old boy when he dropped him from the top of a 14-storey building because he refused to steal sweets became the youngest inmate of an American high security prison this week. A Chicago judge agreed on Monday to a request from the state of Illinois's social services department for the boy and his 13-year-old accomplice to be transferred to a juvenile penitentiary because they were "unrepentant" and "dangerous to others".

Surgeon fuels blood row

AN ISRAELI heart surgeon, adding to the controversy on blood banks discarding donations from Ethiopians Jews, said he would also operate on Ethiopians for fear of catching AIDS. Danny Gur said critics of the policy were "outrageous loudmouths". "I got tricked in operations. The danger is tremendous. I am afraid," he said on a television chat show on Monday night.

UN tribunal staff beaten

THE United Nations tribunal investigating genocide in Rwanda has protested to the authorities in Kigali after three of its investigators were beaten by Rwandan army soldiers, the prosecutor Richard Goldstone's office said yesterday. The assault happened in the Rwandan capital on Monday. The motive was unclear, but it did not appear to be directed against the tribunal or its work, his office said in a statement.

\$2bn lost to too many secrets

THE MOST secret arm of United States intelligence maintained such intense internal security that it lost \$2 billion (£1.98 billion) in a vicious contingency even knowing the money had gone. Congressional investigators reported yesterday. The money, which was mostly recovered after a huge audit by a special team of accountants recruited by the CIA and given special security clearances, will be used to pay for the US peace-keeping mission in Bosnia and for new B-2 bombers.

Chrétien raises the stakes

CANADA'S prime minister, Jean Chrétien, has raised the stakes in Quebec's fight for independence. As Lucien Bouchard, the leading separatist, was sworn in on Monday as the province's new premier, Mr Chrétien endorsed the concept of partition. "If Canada is divisible, Quebec is divisible too," he said. "The logic of secession is the same logic."

Alaska chills Dole's chances

THE already clouded prospects of Senator Robert Dole, the front-runner in the race among Republicans to secure the party candidacy for the United States presidential elections, worsened yesterday as the rightwing populist Pat Buchanan won a straw poll among party supporters in Alaska with 33 per cent of the vote.

I was in the same class as Tony Blair in the mid-sixties. We were at a private, selective prep school, which promoted 'high fliers' ahead of their year group.

Letters, page 8

Police fail to calm fears

Julian Borger in Sarajevo

THE Serbs of Ilidza have come to the conclusion that if the local United Nations police station is any measure of the world's commitment to a multi-ethnic Sarajevo, it is time to pack their bags.

Four days before Serb suburbs like Ilidza are formally handed over to the Bosnian government, there were only four UN officers on duty in a converted restaurant to monitor one of the most sensitive districts in the country.

Asked whether the gradual arrival of the UN police force might lead them to reconsider, one of a group of grim-faced men stacking window frames swept his arm across a deserted common and asked: "Where are they now?"



Ethnic trickle... Serbs leave Sarajevo by horse and cart as the Bosnian government prepares to take over their suburbs

essential for international civilian police to provide training and monitoring. Contributing states promised to send more than 1,700 police officers to Bosnia. So far, fewer than 200 have arrived. Of the 500 due to take up positions in Serb-held Sarajevo, about 40 are in place.

able to move federal forces in until March 30. In the meantime, under an agreement brokered this week by Carl Bildt, the international community's High Representative in Bosnia, local Serb police will be responsible for law and order.

JOINTS and sent them home in their underwear. Spokesmen at the LFOR base in Ilidza said they had no knowledge of the incident — but added privately that they hoped the story was true.

Local treaties undermine Moscow's authority

Russia's power-sharing deals with border regions are designed to secure electoral support, writes James Meek

THE rulers of two of Russia's border regions entered the power vacuum left by Moscow's ineffectual governance yesterday, signing treaties with the Kremlin which cast further doubt on who really controls the sprawling federation.

The four treaties mark a dramatic departure for Mr Yeltsin's administration, which had previously struck agreements with the federation's 21 ethnically-based autonomous republics. Such deals were meant to appease separatist sentiments in places like Tatarstan, which at one stage looked likely to become another Chechnya.



In fact, the effect seems to be the opposite — to add four new kinds of relationship between the federal government and the regions on top of the bewildering variety which already exists.

right to prevent its conscripts from fighting fellow-Muslims. In the Buddhist autonomous republic of Kalmykia, the president, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, recently organised his own re-election: a move generally recognised as illegal. He is still in place.

He said the people of Orenburg — where drought caused severe crop failures last year — were angry that they had paid \$140 million into the federal treasury and got little in return. Another source of bitterness was the apparent

prosperity of the neighbouring autonomous republic of Bashkortostan, which already has a power-sharing treaty. Russian nationalists from Vladimir Zhirinovskiy to Alexander Solzhenitsyn have urged the abolition of the whole Stalin-inspired system of republics, regions, districts and special cities in favour of a single territorial entity like a US state, German Land or — Zhirinovskiy's model — the imperial Russian guberniya.

For now, Mr Yeltsin and his circle appear content to use the treaty system as a means to secure electoral support and keep old friends happy. Kaliningrad's need for special status is obvious but it is striking that Sverdlovsk is where Mr Yeltsin made his career, Orenburg is where the prime minister, Victor Chernomyrdin, was born and Krasnodar is the old haunt of Nikolai Yegorov, the president's new chief of staff.

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A triple whammy

Lies, damned lies and PM's question time

PEOPLE criticise Prime Minister's question-time for many things, almost all of them true. It is noisy. It is crude. It is confrontational. But on this occasion let us stick to the facts. Or rather let us stick to the fibs. For the official falsehoods which disfigured yesterday afternoon's question time session are disturbingly indicative of the low level of public politics which we are likely to have to endure for perhaps another fifteen months until the general election.

John Major made three apparently factual boasts in yesterday's question-time. Each related to an area at the absolute heart of the political battle — the economy, education and law and order. Each was cheered by his supporters. Each went unchallenged by his opponents. Each was false.

Mr Major's first claim came when he defied anyone to find any western economy that can match the current economic performance of this country under this Government. Well, the Economist published the latest figures for annual increase in gross domestic product this week, the traditional yardstick for measuring economic performance. In those figures Britain's GDP growth is shown at 1.8 per cent. In other words Britain stands eleventh out of fifteen nations in this GDP league, out-performed by Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Holland, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the United States. Nor is Britain at the top of any of the other economic indicator leagues. We are eighth on industrial production, third on retail sales, seventh on unemployment, twelfth on consumer prices and eleventh on producer prices.

Mr Major's second claim concerned education. This time he said that universities had no reason to introduce top-up student fees and that vice-chancellors could not complain about the way they have been treated under this

Government. Between 1989-90 and 1994-95, he said, university funding rose by 23 per cent over and above inflation. What he failed to say, however, was that in the same period the number of students going to Britain's universities has increased by more than 45 per cent as a direct result of a conscious policy about which, in other circumstances, the Conservatives are very proud. Moreover the amount of public money spent on each university student has therefore decreased by 25 per cent in the five years in question.

Finally Mr Major claimed twice that the Conservative government is the first government in 40 years which is presiding over a fall in the crime figures. It is certainly true that crime has fallen for the last two years, as the Prime Minister says. But the fall of 350,000 recorded offences between 1992 and 1994 is dwarfed by the rise of more than a million new offences in the two years before that. Completely contrary to Mr Major's claim, recorded crime has also fallen much more recently than the 1950s. It fell in the mid 1980s under the Conservatives, and it fell for two successive years between 1977 and 1979 at the end of the last Labour government as well. At that time, it is worth recalling, recorded crime was less than half the total that it is now.

All politicians use figures which suit their particular case. But it is a bit alarming, to put it mildly, when a prime minister makes an important claim in each of the three principal areas of the current political battle and each is so spectacularly false. Of Mr Major's three attempts yesterday, two were untrue and the third was extremely misleading. If nothing else, that tally proves the need for real alertness about false political claims. We will continue to hold them up to the light as the contest rages. Meanwhile what was that about Three Strikes and Out?

How to cure Europe's troubles

Cut interest rates: we've nothing to lose but the dole queues

YESTERDAY'S simultaneous economic stimulation by France and Germany should be thoroughly welcomed even if it won't be enough to blow Europe out of the economic doldrums. If one country attempts to increase consumption alone then, as France knows to its cost, it can boost imports and run straight into balance of payments difficulties. But if a number of countries do it simultaneously they can offset increased imports by exporting to one another. Europe is a largely self-sufficient economic block with a regular trade surplus with the rest of the world but has hardly ever exploited this potential to the full — except for one overzealous example: the current dash to reduce budget deficits in line with the Maastricht criteria, a policy which is in danger of forcing the EU into an unnecessary recession. Today's environment — economic stagnation without inflation — cries out for a multi-pronged stimulation by Europe and the US. France is faced with a rapid slowdown in growth in 1996 when unemployment is meeting strong social resistance. Yesterday it tried to persuade people to save less and spend more when its government cut the interest rate paid on popular tax-free savings accounts by one per cent and offered tax breaks on products like cars. This is necessary because French people are saving much more of their national income (14 per cent) than they usually do. But the reason they are doing this is a deep-rooted fear of unemployment

(now 11.5 per cent compared with 8 per cent in the UK) which is unlikely to be removed by a one per cent drop in interest rates alone.

Germany announced what was described as a "vitamin dose" to boost the economy and reduce unemployment while at the same time cutting the budget deficit (from 3.5 per cent to 3.0 per cent of GDP) to meet the Maastricht deadline. The background is that economic growth in the main industrialised economies is likely to be lower than expected this year with the exception of Japan which is just beginning to crawl out of the worst recession for decades. It is not yet the time to be pressing panic buttons, though it may come pretty soon. There is often a pause in growth during the business cycle before normal expansion is resumed. A slowdown in world growth temporarily exacerbated by the stockbuilding cycle has hit Europe particularly hard because it has coincided with the Maastricht-induced fiscal squeeze — with associated high interest rates. The squeeze has stunted growth and worsened unemployment, thereby depriving governments of tax revenues which could have brought those deficits down by a different route. The answer is for all the main economies to reduce their interest rates simultaneously. There has rarely been a moment in the past 30 years when the risks from inflation have been so low. France did the right thing yesterday. Others should follow her example swiftly and unashamedly.

HSE does not believe that the signalling scheme is unsafe, however, we have given Railtrack a list of issues to be resolved. S S J Robertson, HM Chief Inspecting Officer of Railways, Rose Court, 2 Southwark Bridge, London SE1 9BE.

Tackling the Soames syndrome

The Government must make up for its neglect of Gulf veterans

WHO IS the real Nicholas Soames: the Armed Forces Minister who pledges his full support for British troops, or the minister who describes a unanimous all-party Commons select committee report on Gulf war syndrome as "unhelpful"? Yesterday, the veterans won a small victory. Fatty was forced to concede to veteran demands, which already had the support of MPs, and set up a full-blown epidemiological study into Gulf war veteran sicknesses — and into the deformities suffered by their children born since the war.

The veterans have every reason to feel aggrieved. Their treatment has been shabby. If the troops in the Gulf had adopted the same defensive postures as ministers, the war would never have been won. Faced with a possible serious new medical syndrome, ministers seized every opportunity to procrastinate as sickness claims mounted. It took them two years to set up a

medical assessment programme — and even then only allocated a doctor for two days a week — with a further two more years before being ready to compile the data necessary for an epidemiological study. If George Bush was "wobbly" before the war, ministers have been wet and weak-kneed since. Troops which were given "the best possible equipment" before the war, have been denied proper medical surveillance since. The MPs were right: compared to action in America, the Government's response has been "parsimonious" and "hopelessly inadequate". It is one thing to be sceptical about a new syndrome; it is quite another to have delayed for so long an investigation into possible causes, particularly the dangers of mixing vaccinations with anti-nerve gas tablets. Policy, as MPs asserted, should be driven by "the welfare of those who served their country, not financial considerations."

These changes would also increase the prison population by around 30,000. This would require 50 more prisons the size of Dartmoor at a capital cost of £3 billion and running costs of over £500 million a year. Paul Cavardino, Chair, Penal Affairs Consortium, 189 Clapham Road, London SW9 0PU.

As a probable Labour voter and the victim of both a knife attack and a burglary in the not-too-distant past, I am indebted to Michael Heseltine for putting me straight on my relationship with criminals. I am obviously not to be trusted. Simon B Monks, 52 Wickworth Street, Nelson BB9 0LQ.



Letters to the Editor

Rights, lights and a wrong

GEOFF Mulgan calls on New Labour to embrace that hoary old cliché, "the right to work" (A high-stake society, January 30). But rights necessarily involve duties. The right to work, logically, has to imply a duty to offer employment. Either that duty falls on employers who would be forced by a Labour government to offer employment, corporatist-style, to un-economic workers, against the employers' better judgment, or it would fall to the Government to become a supplier-of-last-resort, running totalitarian (though no doubt benign) labour camps.

Which alternative is Mulgan advocating? John Torode, 25 Platt's Lane, London NW3 7NP.

THE National Grid Company has been very publicly congratulating itself on its "near miss" — no power cuts were necessary after all, say spokesmen. But I would like to report a power cut in Chatham between 3 and 4 pm on Monday. Does this mean they didn't notice, or was it just a good old-fashioned unnecessary power cut? Gary Croom, 66 Thorold Road, Chatham, Kent ME5 7EB.

YOUR report about the signalling scheme at Ashford International station contains a factual inaccuracy (Engineer sees rail signal peril, January 27). Major Holden, one of HSE's Assistant Chief Inspecting Officers of Railways, has not said "no further action needs to be taken". New signalling principles have been introduced since the scheme was originally designed and the Ashford scheme does not yet meet latest agreed standards.

HSE does not believe that the signalling scheme is unsafe, however, we have given Railtrack a list of issues to be resolved. S S J Robertson, HM Chief Inspecting Officer of Railways, Rose Court, 2 Southwark Bridge, London SE1 9BE.

THE Prime Minister's request to Labour to cooperate in passing the Government's forthcoming legislation on sentencing should be unequivocally rejected. Requiring judges to pass minimum sentences whatever the individual circumstances will prevent courts from achieving justice in sentencing. Automatic life sentences for repeat violent offenders will remove any incentive to plead guilty, leading to fewer admissions of guilt, more distress to victims and a greater risk of wrongful acquittals. Taking away the prospect of early release through remission or parole will remove an enormous incentive to good behaviour and increase the risk of riots, violence and hostage-taking in prisons.

This year's budget round will be appalling: cuts in libraries will reduce everyone's quality of life, cuts in the youth service will increase crime and alienation, cuts in social services will mean that people do not get the care they desperately need, cuts in the fire service, in street lighting, gritting or road safety will almost certainly cost lives. Even the so-called "additional" funding for schools will not be enough to stop rising class sizes.

My schooldays with Tony Blair

I WAS in the same class as Tony Blair for two years in the mid-sixties (Battle for Britain, January 29). We were at a private, selective prep school, which promoted "high fliers" ahead of their year group. Five ages of child were spread over eight classes; marks for all work were compiled twice each term in a monthly order, seating for meals was determined by position in the previous term's end-of-term exams.

Many of the lessons Blair learnt at Durham's Chorister School are echoed in the leader's views on education and the New Party's policy. Unfortunately, his ideas don't seem to have developed much subsequently. I can't imagine that Tony understands comprehensive education any better now than he did then. Paul J Robinson, Snainton, Scarborough YO13.

TONY BLAIR'S "fast track" proposal has the vagueness which is becoming his hallmark. This vagueness is the consequence of his refusal to spend money. Real solutions cost real money, and the price of a refusal to spend money must be to use news-management as a substitute for policy. We have had that approach for 16 years and the criminal statistics show where it leads. Lord Russell, Liberal Democrat Social Security Spokesman, House of Lords, London SW1A 0AA.

ANYBODY who has worked with children knows that, while intellectual ability can be developed beyond their years, it is not wise to forge ahead with their social or emotional development. J M Stott, 78a Hanover Street, Brighton BN2 2SS.

SEVENTY-FIVE years ago, I left the babies' class to enter the "big school" in our village. If you progressed exceptionally well in Standard 1 you leaptfrogged over Standard 2 into Standard 3 — and so on. At the age of nine, I found myself in Standard 7 with the 14-year-olds. I then secured a scholarship to a local public school. Remarkably, my wife's schooldays took exactly the same path, albeit in another village. Fast-track education is nothing new. Ted Austlin, 7 Willingham Road, Over, Cambridge CB4 5PD.

MY MOTHER was born in 1901. She went to the village school at Grimsthorpe in Yorkshire, which children attended from around four until the school-leaving age of 13. Mum was top of the top class in the school at nine. She couldn't go to the grammar school in Barnsley, be-

cause her parents couldn't afford to buy the uniform or pay the train fare.

For the next four years — till she was 13 and could leave — she did odd jobs and taught classes, for which she was paid 2s 6d a week. All her life, she felt disadvantaged that her education had effectively ended at nine.

Tony Blair should remember this when he advocates that children should "forge ahead in areas of strength" instead of staying with their age group. What will happen to fast-track children if they get a top grade in maths A level at 14? Do they drop maths until they go to university at 18 and meanwhile let their brains ossify? Or do they go to university at 14 and say goodbye to childhood and a general education? Janet Evans, Wyehwood Court, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxon OX7 6AN.

Old-age tension

WE ARE delighted that reports on paying for long-term care are finally acknowledging that families make the main contribution (Homes plan to improve old-age care, January 30). These so-called informal carers provide far more care than any agency, and the estimated national cost of such care is twice that of any formal care — though of course the cost is notional, and not paid for. The IPPR report clearly shows that any cut in informal care in the community results in greater demands for formal care, with consequent extra Treasury costs.

We cannot provide the care we need without families' unpaid contribution; but if this is to continue, we must support them properly. We must start investing in informal care instead of taking it for granted — for it affects us all. Jill Pitkeathley, Carers National Association, 20-25 Glasshouse Yard, London EC1A 4JS.

YOUR report of the Retirement Income Inquiry (Grey timebomb at the heart of the Western welfare state, January 27) suggests that Sir John Anson and his colleagues have accepted the commonly held view that continuation of tax-financed pensions would become unpopular with the electors, owing to the inevitable increase in the ratio of pensioners to



working-age population up to the year 2035. On past experience, real incomes will increase over the same period. Indeed, on the modest assumption of a 2 per cent annual growth rate for real GNP, real income will increase to more than double its present level by 2035. It must follow that although the tax burden (National Insurance contributions) under the present system would increase in percentage terms, the working population would still enjoy much higher living standards than today. Brian Overall, 46 Kenton Court, Kensington High Street, London W14 8NW.

THE workforce supports not only the elderly but the young and many other unproductive groups: is it supports the whole population. Your graph shows an almost stable (but slightly declining) population of about 60 million. The working population is 32 million, falling to 29 million. Each 100 workers now support 190 persons and will, in

2065, support 210, an increase of 10.5 per cent or less. As we now have at least 10 per cent unemployment, the problem would appear to be not our increased longevity, but the under-usage of our productive capacity. A L Flight, 26 Gresham Avenue, Westbrook, Margate, Kent CT9 5EH.

AS technology advances, newer workers produce more wealth than the many of previous generations. In 1901 in Britain, there were 13 of working age to each person of 65 and over. By 1991 there were only four; by 2011 this will reduce to 3.8. As a result, we have become poorer during this century and do we now dread the prospect of living a long healthy life? Don't panic. Our National Insurance has coped since 1926 and certainly can do so until 2011. Joe Harris, Chair, Islington Pensioners' Forum, 91a Tollymore Way, London N7 6RE.

A sticky wicket

IN THE wake of your piece on the BBC's fresh negotiations with Sky TV for highlights of next month's Cricket World Cup, your readers should be aware of one or two key facts (BBC hits back for World Cup deal, January 30). The bid the BBC has put back on the table is identical to the one we made last autumn — when Sky broke off negotiations. Since then there has been much public debate about the monopolisation of TV sports rights.

When Sky let it be known that our bid would be reconsidered, it was duly made last Monday by our head of sport, Jonathan Martin, with my full knowledge and support.

We hope the bid — which remains a very fair one — will be successful and that all cricket fans can at least enjoy the highlights of this competition. In the meantime, any talk of "derisory" offers and "humiliations" should be accompanied by a double pinch of salt. Will Wyatt, Managing Director, BBC Network Television, Television Centre, Wood Lane, London W12 7RJ.

Please include a full postal address, even an e-mailed letters, and a telephone number. We may edit letters: shorter ones are more likely to appear. We regret we cannot acknowledge those not used.

Cuts the country can't afford

BEFORE catastrophic decisions are taken in Parliament today concerning this year's local government funding, Liberal Democrat county councillors want the public to be absolutely clear what is at stake. Local government is not being squeezed — it is being strangled. We deliver services far more efficiently and economically than Whitehall, and councillors can adjust those services quickly in response to local demand. But we are no longer able to deliver anything like the services needed.

This year's budget round will be appalling: cuts in libraries will reduce everyone's quality of life, cuts in the youth service will increase crime and alienation, cuts in social services will mean that people do not get the care they desperately need, cuts in the fire service, in street lighting, gritting or road safety will almost certainly cost lives. Even the so-called "additional" funding for schools will not be enough to stop rising class sizes.

Why is this shameful state of affairs happening in one of the richest countries in the world? Because we are governed by MPs who, although paid to look after people's needs, are sitting in Westminster plotting how to save their own careers; MPs who are forcing county councils to push people off the lifeboat so they can try to buy the next election with the money saved.

And because Her Majesty's Opposition, by their eternal shame, did not even oppose the one-penny-off-income-tax bribe. (Cllr) Liz Tucker, Leader, Hereford & Worcester County Council. (Cllr) Geoffrey Tapper, Leader, Dorset County Council. (Cllr) Chris Clarke, Leader, Somerset County Council. and 18 other LibDem county councillors and group leaders. As from: County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester WR5 2NF.

A Country Diary

TAMAR VALLEY: Cargreen's broad street leads directly to the river, where flooding tide is brown and choppy in the east wind. Across the channel a broken shard stands out from mud below Thorn Point, marking the Devon side of an ancient ferry crossing which became busy a century ago after the opening of South Western's railway from Plymouth to Waterloo. Local growers brought early strawberries to be rowed over, transferred into wagons and hauled to Bere Ferrers station for dispatch to London and the North. Regular market boats carried produce to Bere Ferrers station for dispatch to London and the North. Regular market boats carried produce to Bere Ferrers station for dispatch to London and the North. Regular market boats carried produce to Bere Ferrers station for dispatch to London and the North.

famous Du Plessis daffodils a few years ago, Landulph church is sheltered beside Kingsmill Lake. On this cold January afternoon, colour is muted with bare branches, stonework and frost. Succulent pennyworts, yellow lichens and wiry sphenwort ferns cling to the churchyard's slatery wall and water flows in a ditch alongside the path to a dilapidated landing. Beyond the marsh, separating church from shore, contorted purple rocks and dark brown seaweed front the Tamar ria. This was a port for travellers to Santiago de Compostela and, in 1434, at least 180 pilgrims set sail. Those from up-country had crossed by ferry boat after resting in Bere Ferrers church and the Cornish contingent came down Paradise Lane for embarkation beneath St Dill's church. Today squat ammunition barges are moored downstream and, high above Saltash passage, are the suspension road bridge and Brunel's great tubular and strutted railway link. VIRGINIA SPIERS

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Diary
Matthew Norman

Signs of an unexpected crisis for Mr Tony Blair have been noted in Henbury. In the build-up to tomorrow's election, there have been attempts to remove posters bearing the slogan "New Labour", on the grounds that voters think they refer to Arthur Scargill's newly formed Socialist Labour party. This confusion gives Mr Blair, Jandy Mandelson and Alastair "Bob's Boy" Campbell (the keeper of the Maxwell flame) a problem: what is Labour to call itself now? Newish Labour? Quite Fresh Labour? Not So Old And Sotled Labour? All save their attractions, it's true, but the Diary's choice is Intermediate Labour. It gives the precise impression of middle-of-the-road harmlessness which Blair is so eager to cultivate. "So then, I say to you..." (Dramatic pause.) "Intermediate Labour." (Flashing eyes, snarl-of-a-smile.) "Intermediate Labour." (Standing ovation.) Yes, I think it might just work.

JOURNALISTS at the Independent have been in the newsroom of two dome-like black bowls. They are mounted outside the office of acting editor Gentleman Charlie Wilson, and they contain not flowers or plants but close-circuit cameras, sending pictures of reporters at their desks to the Canary Towers security room. How tremendously civilised. Rumours that the paper is planning a merger with Jeremy Beadle — he will write the lead, the backs will supply accidents for You've Been Framed — have yet to be denied.

INCREDIBLY, one of Diary's New Year predictions has already come true. The dog, who is widely regarded as the western world's leading canine soothsayer, foresaw that an estranged royal wife would be offered an Oprah-style chat show. We now learn that the DS network CBS has offered Fergie \$1 million to do just that. Admittedly, Steptoe gave the job to Diana. But even so, is this not uncanny?

FLICKING through the text of a speech he gave last Friday, I am astonished by the Prince of Wales's mastery of vocabulary. The subject of the speech — or "Remarks the Prince of Wales may care to make at Cromford Mill", as his press office quaintly calls it — was the mill architecture of the North-west, and he began by describing the scale of the problem as "enormous". Mind you, when it comes to attempts to put things right, he is "enormously encouraged". On the other hand, the size of the problem remains "enormous". And yet, let us not be gloomy, for English Heritage has made "enormous efforts", while the group gathered to hear him included people with "enormous expertise". It is noble stuff, of course, but didn't you find him a more engaging orator in his mucky period, when he used to talk to Camilla about sanitary protection?

ANOTHER message left in his machine, another deafening silence in reply... the vigil for my friend Dr Julian Lewis reaches day 10, and still he is missing. I am now offering \$25 for a positive sighting of the little chap who, before his disappearance, worked at Central Office, searching the airwaves for anti-Tory bias. I have ordered a dozen yellow ribbons, and the next time I see the old oak tree in Smith Square until (God be merciful) he returns safe.

NEWS of yet another breakthrough in the fight against crime. Presenting himself at East Ham police station, an elderly man passed the desk sergeant a piece of paper and sheepishly said: "I've done my lines." Having investigated, the sergeant found out that a copper who stopped him on a minor motoring offence had offered him an alternative to being charged. This the old boy had taken: the piece of paper must not drive in the No Entry zone", neatly written out 50 times.



On the edge of darkness

Commentary Will Hutton

THE OIL shocks of the 1970s were sobering events. They made not just Britain but the industrialised West aware that the engines of their prosperity depended on energy — and oil in particular. There had to be a policy ensuring the security of energy supplies both domestically and internationally. World economic summits anxiously scrutinised the projections of the newly formed International Energy Agency to see whether world demand and supply were likely to balance, while at home Britain's Department of Energy tried to guarantee that Britain had as diversified an energy base as possible. It monitored prices, investment and the technical imperatives of energy provision.

In electricity, gas, coal and oil the state either owned directly or had stakes in the great corporations, to ensure the supply of the country's vital needs. Twenty years on and the Department of Energy has been scrapped: British Gas, the CEB, the National Grid

and British Coal have been privatised; BNGC (British National Oil Corporation) and the government shareholding in BP have long since been sold. There is a so-called spot-market in which electricity suppliers "compete" to offer their electricity supply for sale. Britain's energy is delivered by private corporations operating in "lightly" regulated private markets; no longer is there felt any need for the Government to attempt to diversify the country's energy supplies or ensure the security of future provision. That can be decided by private agents responding to price signals, with simply an upper-price threshold set by the regulator.

In some respects this transformation was justified. International co-ordination of energy policy was never much more than a talking shop, and the big jumps in productivity in the privatised utilities showed the scope for cost-savings. Although Britain is rich in coal, the cost and danger of mining increasingly thin seams at ever greater depths was prohibitive — and the switch to gas allows cleaner, cheaper and more flexible electricity generation. Moreover, the break-up of the old monopolists has opened the way to a greater diversity of supply, with environmentally friendly energy sources like wind and solar power springing up.

But like all fashions the pendulum has swung too far. Most reports of Monday's narrowly averted electricity cuts suggested that it was the first crisis of this type; in fact the grid has been close to collapse twice in the past six months. That all this has been happening while the directors receive an extraordinary range of salary increases, bonuses and share options may seem like a cheap and rather overworked piece of populism — but it is true nonetheless. The security of British electricity supply is weaker, the risk of breakdown greater and the price performance — given the fall in basic energy prices — only moderate since privatisation.

British electricity prices are slightly below the OECD average for household consumers; slightly above for industrial consumers. This cannot be described as a triumph. But financially privatisation has been truly wonderful. The rate of return on National Grid shareholders' funds unadjusted for inflation runs in excess of 25 per cent; the power generators and electricity companies make around 23 per cent. Few British companies make such consistently high, risk-free returns; as a benchmark remember that in public ownership the utilities had to make 8 per cent real rates of return.

Even allowing for inflation there has been a near doubling of their profitability since privatisation — reflected in the regional electricity companies (RECs) buying back their own shares fast and furiously in an attempt to stave off takeover. But they are too juicy a prize, and only three of the original 12 have now escaped the attentions of rich predators.

It is this financial performance that explains almost all the deficiencies of privatisation. For the utilities hold monopolistic franchises, and once the price cap is set by the regulator the only way to make returns of this magnitude is to displace risk on to others — the consumers and the workforce.

The savage losses of manpower are well-publicised, and with good reason. One director of a utility, talking about the paybacks on various forms of investment, told me recently that while he reckoned it took four or five years for most standard investments in new capacity to return the original outlay, redundancies paid back in 22 months. Lay-offs, he remarked sadly, given the low level of British redundancy payments, offered him the highest and fastest returns of all. The social security system and the individual worker pick up the bill.

But Monday's near implosion of the grid highlighted another way in which risk is passed on to others. Spare capacity to meet winter surges of demand or unexpected withdrawal of some power stations from the supply network, as happened last summer, costs the power generators and RECs money. It

means tying up idle funds in potentially unused capacity. Far better to run the system with the least capacity possible, and either subject consumers to power cuts or bring in more capacity from a cross-channel link with France — if it's available.

This is good for the electricity companies in their quest to meet their financial targets, but bad for the rest of us. Those industries and businesses which cannot risk a power interruption are compelled to invest in back-up power-generation capacity, reducing their profitability and diverting funds away from more useful forms of investment; hospitals have to tie up limited funds in spare power-generation capacity, because a power cut that prevents operations can threaten lives — already a subject of controversy at one London hospital. Individual households can lose electricity and warmth when it's most needed — which for the very old can mean death. Just the possibility of a power cut becomes a major source of worry even for those for whom such concerns are unjustified; after all, who wants to die from hypothermia? The power companies have reduced their risk — but increased ours.

Perhaps more seriously, the demand for oil and gas is rising rapidly across the globe, reproducing almost exactly the potential imbalance between supply and demand that led to the 1970s oil shocks. The utilities provide the public good of energy for all. This ethic could have been retained, even after privatisation. But it has been lost through greed, indifference, regulation and the financial orientation of British corporate life; it will not be regained. So get used to shivering and endlessly resetting the VCR after power cuts — and don't forget to congratulate the directors on their business acumen!

There is still a traditional British constitution is not only unfair to minorities. It is unfair, also, to the majority. Under our rough-and-ready electoral system, the last three Conservative governments secured overall majorities — landslide majorities, indeed, in 1983 and 1987 — on just 42 per cent of the vote.

The Conservatives have quite happily governed in the face of the nearly three-fifths of the voters who rejected them. Yet, while insisting that the minority in Northern Ireland be given a place in the government of the province, the Conservatives refuse to countenance a voting method which would ensure that a majority in the commons represents a majority in the country.

If there is a fundamental leitmotif to the Northern Ireland policies of the governments led by Margaret Thatcher and John Major, it is that of power-sharing. They have insisted that the unionist majority in Northern Ireland share power both with the nationalist minority within the province and with the Irish Republic. The guiding principle of the Framework Document was "that the consent of the governed is an essential ingredient for stability in any political arrangement". But is there any evidence that this consent continues to be given to constitutional arrangements on the mainland? Nearly three-fifths of the electorate, after all, voted in 1992 for parties proposing constitutional change. The Conservatives, moreover, have set their face against any other method of electing consent such as the referendum which Kenneth Clarke has anatomised as contrary to the principles of parliamentary government — except, of course, in Northern Ireland.

The Framework Document proposed that Northern Ireland enjoy the constitutional checks and balances that we have enjoyed in the past to coincide before independence. They are also the very constitutional devices that we pressed upon the new Federal German state after the war. Is it not time that we begin to consider whether we might not at last bestow these same benefits upon ourselves?

Vernon Bogdanor is Reader in Government at Oxford University and a Fellow of Brasenose College. His essays on Politics and the Constitution will be published shortly by Dartmouth.

The return on National Grid's shareholders' funds unadjusted for inflation is over 25 per cent

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At death's door in the English countryside



David McKie

WENT to Berkshire yesterday, which, unless the House of Lords takes a different view from the Court of Appeal, is something one won't be able to do for much longer. In a local government review once forecast to be a cull of the counties, Royal Berkshire — alone of the ancient counties — is marked down for abolition. The power companies have reduced their risk — but increased ours.

Perhaps more seriously, the demand for oil and gas is rising rapidly across the globe, reproducing almost exactly the potential imbalance between supply and demand that led to the 1970s oil shocks. The utilities provide the public good of energy for all. This ethic could have been retained, even after privatisation. But it has been lost through greed, indifference, regulation and the financial orientation of British corporate life; it will not be regained. So get used to shivering and endlessly resetting the VCR after power cuts — and don't forget to congratulate the directors on their business acumen!

There is still a traditional British constitution is not only unfair to minorities. It is unfair, also, to the majority. Under our rough-and-ready electoral system, the last three Conservative governments secured overall majorities — landslide majorities, indeed, in 1983 and 1987 — on just 42 per cent of the vote.

The Conservatives have quite happily governed in the face of the nearly three-fifths of the voters who rejected them. Yet, while insisting that the minority in Northern Ireland be given a place in the government of the province, the Conservatives refuse to countenance a voting method which would ensure that a majority in the commons represents a majority in the country.

If there is a fundamental leitmotif to the Northern Ireland policies of the governments led by Margaret Thatcher and John Major, it is that of power-sharing. They have insisted that the unionist majority in Northern Ireland share power both with the nationalist minority within the province and with the Irish Republic. The guiding principle of the Framework Document was "that the consent of the governed is an essential ingredient for stability in any political arrangement". But is there any evidence that this consent continues to be given to constitutional arrangements on the mainland? Nearly three-fifths of the electorate, after all, voted in 1992 for parties proposing constitutional change. The Conservatives, moreover, have set their face against any other method of electing consent such as the referendum which Kenneth Clarke has anatomised as contrary to the principles of parliamentary government — except, of course, in Northern Ireland.

The Framework Document proposed that Northern Ireland enjoy the constitutional checks and balances that we have enjoyed in the past to coincide before independence. They are also the very constitutional devices that we pressed upon the new Federal German state after the war. Is it not time that we begin to consider whether we might not at last bestow these same benefits upon ourselves?

Vernon Bogdanor is Reader in Government at Oxford University and a Fellow of Brasenose College. His essays on Politics and the Constitution will be published shortly by Dartmouth.

the start of the next. This sense of disjointedness is made worse by the furious pace of the county's expansion, from 413,000 in 1961 to 774,000 in a vastly smaller acreage now. There is only one new town in the county, Bracknell, where the parish population has grown since the 1950s from 5,000 to 50,000. But the savage pressures of population growth and the shift to south-east England have created other force-fed communities too; like Earley and Woodley on the outskirts of Reading, four or five times the size that they were in the early fifties, or further West, Theale (1,500 to 10,000) and Thatcham (5,000 to 20,000). Evolutionary growth, people can just about take; such engineered expansions, destroying continuity, discomfit them.

Even more hurtful, perhaps, was the major amputation the county suffered in the seventies when, abandoning the Thames, the county's natural boundary from its beginning, a notable chunk of the county between Oxford to the Ridgeway was struck from the map. George Orwell was buried in Berkshire, in the churchyard at Sutton Courtenay, but he too is now in Oxfordshire. Even the white horse at Dinginton, the county's traditional symbol, contained in its coat of arms, was lost to it.

You can see the results in Mori's findings on people's sense of community. Asked if they felt any strong sense of belonging to Berkshire, only 43 per cent said yes; discounting Avon and Humberside, one of the lowest figures in England. (Hertfordshire, another county peppered with communities, scored 44.) Just possibly a more seductive county town might have helped. Decent, solid, largely unmemorable Reading is close enough to the centre, but it doesn't draw the county together as the best country towns — Hertford, Colchester, Norwich, Ipswich — so satisfyingly do. So Bracknell shops largely in Bracknell, and Newbury shops in Newbury, and Windsor and Maidenhead in Windsor and Maidenhead.

It isn't merely romantic to say that Shropshire has a Shropshire, or Dorset a Dorsetness, where Berkshire lacks a Berkshire. But that's true of Hertfordshire too; and Hertfordshire has been saved.

The outcome in the Lords will not turn, however, on local sentiment; only on whether, in varying the LGC's last word on the subject (five unitary authorities) to his own solution — six (the solution also favoured by all but one of the county's MPs — John Gummer has gone beyond mere "modification" to something more strenuous. On that technical, dictionary matter, a thousand years of Berkshire history hangs. Grimmany!



Sauce for goose

If John Major's electoral plans for Ulster were applied to mainland Britain, they could result in the break-up of the UK, argues Vernon Bogdanor

IN ALL the arguments about the proposed elections in Northern Ireland, no one has stopped to remark on the ease with which John Major has accepted elections by single transferable vote in the province. Meanwhile, when proposed for the mainland, his administration denounces both proportional representation and parliamentary government, and likely to lead to the break-up of the country. Ireland, however, has always been a laboratory for constitutional change. Before the first world war, the Liberal prime minister, HH Asquith, suggested that Irish Home Rule could lead to a federal Britain. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Irish Free State helped us a Dominion to redefining the Commonwealth relationship, so paving the way for the admission of In-

dependent a whole raft of constitutional devices — proportional representation, devolution, referendums, power-sharing and a charter of rights — which John Major has ruled out for any other part of the United Kingdom as destructive of the constitution. Why have ministers been so prepared to accept constitutional changes in Northern Ireland which they regard as anathema elsewhere? The cynical answer would be that, while they are anxious to maintain the Union with Scotland, they are indifferent as to whether Northern Ireland goes or stays. They have, as the Framework Document reiterates, "no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland", a phrase which the Government would hardly dare to use about any other part of the United Kingdom. Is it, then, that John Major, as David Trimble (the Ulster Unionist leader) once suggested, is indeed a unionist, but only in Scotland?

It would be difficult to deny the element of truth in this accusation. The traditional defence of the Union, after all, was that not only did the people of Northern Ireland wish to remain, but that they were right to do so since they would be better governed within the United Kingdom than elsewhere. This has now been reduced to the mealy-mouthed assertion that so long as Northern Ireland wishes to remain, Westminster will continue to assume the responsibilities of government. It is hardly a ringing endorsement of the Union. A less cynical answer, however, was given in the Framework Document. This declared that Northern Ireland is different in that there is "fundamental absence of consensus" on constitutional issues. Yet it is not so much the absence of consensus that has moved the Government, but the nature of the gulf between majority and minority.

For Northern Ireland is alone in the United Kingdom in possessing a minority which seeks to belong to another state — the Irish Republic. And only in Northern Ireland is a minority of that minority prepared to use violence to end British rule. Yet it is difficult to understand why minorities which do not resort to violence are any less deserving of protection. In Scotland, for example, there is also a "fundamental absence of consensus" on constitutional issues. If survey

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Diary

Sandor Iharos

Runner held back by love, not tanks

THE DEATH at the age of 65 of Sandor Iharos, who set world athletic records at seven distances in the space of 13 months, evokes memories of the fifties, when Hungary's free spirit was expressed in its sporting achievements.

There was Puskas and his footballers, and the trio of László Tabori, István Rozsnyó and Iharos on Europe's athletic tracks. One Olympic bronze medal between the three of them seems slight reward for such talent, but their running lives moved into the shadows of the 1956 Budapest uprising, when Soviet tanks crushed some of their fellow citizens and blurred that concentration which every sportsman needs.

Whether Iharos would have challenged Vladimir Kuts and Gordon Pirie in the epic Olympic 10,000 metres struggle at the Melbourne Olympics that year must be a conversational piece for those who remember the White City Bank Holiday meetings in which the Hungarians always seemed to be a part. Yet the popular notion

that injury or the Soviets prevented Iharos going to Melbourne is now laid to rest — it was love that kept him back. That summer, he met a javelin thrower and his dedication to training wavered. When the Hungarian competitors gathered after the Soviet intervention, they decided the Olympics were the best place to demonstrate Hungary's independence; all except Iharos.

On the track, he provided startling evidence of his scope and brilliance — and some rather heavy doubts. He was a man of great heart but little else, other than frail-looking elegance. At half an inch under six feet, he barely tipped the scale at 94 lbs. Yet on the track he was the epitome of athleticism: were those feet touching the track, or had his master coach, Mihály Ligeti, devised another method of motion?

But Iharos did not have the physical or perhaps the mental strength to cope with championship running; he was best when the opposition had faded from his slipstream and he could concentrate on his battle with time. He glided

into the territory of the Finn Paavo Nurmi as the only other runner to break both the world 1500 metres and 10,000 metres records.

As a member of the Honvéd Army Club, he and his colleagues were full-time athletes. Mihály, one of the world's leading coaches, brought him to a plateau of perfection in 1953. In 1954, he broke the European 1500 metres record with 3 mins 42.4 secs, and after another winter's work — Mihály's athletes were doing two seasons of running a day, when Roger Bannister and company were into four or five a week — Iharos ran into a 193-day golden patch in which he broke six world marks.

The first was in Budapest on May 14, when he ran 7 mins 55.6secs for 3,000 metres, to break the record of 7 mins 58.8secs, set six years earlier by Gaston Reiff, of Belgium. Fifteen days later, at the White City, he took advantage of glorious spring sunshine, a 45,000 crowd and László Tabori as an erratic pacemaker. This paper's then athletics correspondent, Larry Montague, de-

scribed Iharos as "a beautifully made lithe figure... prancing along in second place". With two laps remaining, Tabori dropped out and Iharos floated on, thinking about clocks not men — only to be disturbed by the rising roar of the crowd as York-shire's Ken Wood began bearing down on him. The gap narrowed to four yards on the last lap; Wood closed on the final bend, but Iharos just lifted his knees a little higher and took his prize of 8 mins 33.4 secs — seven seconds inside the old record.

Two months later, he broke the world 1500 metres mark with 5 mins 40.8 secs, and then in September and October broke the 5,000 metres record twice (13 mins 50.8 secs and 13 mins 40.6 secs), plus a three miles record (13 mins 14.2 secs) in the second of those races.

But his greatest record-breaking performance came on July 15, 1956, when he lowered Emil Zátopek's 10,000 metres time by an astonishing 12.2 seconds, with a run of 28 mins 42.08 secs. The Soviet Union's Vladimir Kuts beat it



Sandor Iharos... a great heart in a frail-looking body

two months later, but the pair were not to meet in Melbourne.

Iharos and Mihály soon parted, leaving many to wonder what, at the age of 25, he had left undone on the athletic track. His marriage was brief and, after a sports school coaching post, he turned to alcohol, sold vegetables, then worked at a petrol pump. Eight years ago, he suffered a

mild stroke and, more recently, came back into Budapest society, gathering again with those sporting champions who made Hungarian hearts beat faster 40 years ago.

John Rodda

Sandor Iharos, athlete, born March 10, 1930; died January 24, 1995

Barbara Skelton

Short stories and liaisons

BARBARA SKELTON, who has died aged 79, became a star without ever going on the stage. Her radiant beauty attracted a string of lovers, including Kenneth Tynan and Egypt's King Farouk, and led to marriages to writer and critic Cyril Connolly, publisher George Weidenfeld and millionaire Derek Jackson. But she was also a writer of distinction.



Skelton... writer of talent

Barbara was born in Maidenhead, the eldest child of an army officer and a Scandinavian-born Gaiety Theatre girl. There was big money in the area, and a smattering of theatrical talent living in the Fisheries Estate between Maidenhead Bridge and Bray on the Thames. The town of her childhood was sleepy, but there was also a *risqué* quality, epitomised in the notorious Skindie's Hotel.

By the time I met Barbara she had already produced not only her first autobiography, *Years Before Bedtime*, but several novels in which she told all, or nearly all. One of them, *A Love Match* (1968), was pulped after film-maker John Sutor threatened libel action.

Victor Gollancz described her as "one of the best writers in the country". She counted many influential men among her admirers, and I often wondered how she found the time for writing. But write she did, at her best as a short story writer, coming into her own with *Born Losers* in 1965, hailed by Anthony Powell when those 12 witty stories — about Manhattan males — first appeared in *Alan Ross's* *London Magazine*. *Rose*, a one-time lover, thought her best work had a "devastating vein of satirical caricature". Unprepared for their next disappointment, he observed, "the losers" soldiered on.

She went on too, balancing love and her literary existence. In 1956, a second and last autobiography, *Remembering My Good Friends*, appeared.

Cyril Connolly, who she married in 1950, cited Weidenfeld in his 1966 divorce action against Barbara. In Weidenfeld's later 1961 divorce from

her, he cited Connolly. Her third husband, Derek Jackson, was much married himself, and she parried with a settlement substantial near Paris. But that was when she wasn't back in London. In that city she made her old favourite Chelsea a home, and would — until his death in the 1970s — sometimes stay with Connolly. Childless herself, she was nursed in her last illness by one of Connolly's daughters.

It was Connolly who introduced her to King Farouk of Egypt, whom she liked for his good qualities, rather than his regal status. She shared a modest Italian villa-cum-pension with the monarch, rather than a palace. While conceding that Farouk was some way from Rudolph Valentino — whom, when she was a little girl in Maidenhead, she had seen in *The Sheik* — she added that he had better manners than the silent star and was (then) the handsomest man. If not the best lover, she had ever had. She smilingly rebutted the idea of being more than the girlfriend of a king. "After all," she insisted, "I'm not the Queen of Sheba."

If that queen had had the looks that Barbara Skelton possessed in her prime, then she would indeed have been a lucky woman.

Peter Coates

Barbara Skelton, writer, born January 29, 1916; died January 27, 1995

Ramón Vinay

Sound and vision

RAMÓN VINAY, who has died aged 83, was Toscanini's Otello for RCA in one of the most famous of all operatic recordings. Born in Chile of French and Italian parents, he was educated in France and only took to singing (*baritone*) in Mexico, where he was working in his father's *sawdust*. He went in for a *Coco-Cola* singing competition, and in 1931 made his debut at the *Mexico City Opera* as *Alphonse* in *La Favorite*. Five years later, he remained as a tenor and became one of the most successful *baritone* voices of the 1940s and 1950s, with roles such as *Don José*, *Samson*, *Des Grieux*, and later *Radames*, *Otello*, and *Tristan* opposite *Eisenstein's* *Flagstad*, even though he knew no German. For the first six years of the reopened *Bayreuth Festival* he was the main *heldentenor* — *Sigmund* (with *Aspid Varnay*, who writes below, as *Brünnhilde*), *Parsifal*, *Tannhäuser*, as well as *Tristan*. He triumphed as *Cyrano* at *Bergerac* in *Alfano's* operatic version at the *Scala*, also singing *Lensky*, *Canio*, *Samson* and *Herod*. His final years took him back to the *baritone* register, as *Telramund* in *Lohengrin*, as *Bartolo*, *Falstaff*, *Dr Schön*, and *Ingo*, though his farewell to the stage was returning to the role of *Otello* in his own production, in which he was playing *Ingo* — just for the last act.

— the voice, the musicianship, the theatrical flair, and last, but assuredly not least, those Latin good looks that make any woman's heart beat faster.

Ramón and I were very much on the same wavelength when it came to artistry. We both believed in going the last mile and then some for a characterisation, and his devotion to our tasks sometimes led to mighty outbursts of Latin temperament. In one case, during a Bayreuth season early in the 1960s, both Ramón and I found ourselves at loggerheads with the conductor, Herbert von Karajan, who seemed to be concentrating more on the mystical rhythms within his own brain than on the Liebster music in the *Tristan* and *Isolde* score.

While I attempted to soothe the situation as much as possible, Ramón's response to the frustrations of having to sing in time with me without a clear tempo from the pit was to bolt from the stage, vault a fence, and start running into an adjoining field — where my husband, Hermann Weigert, who was on the Bayreuth musical staff, found himself using the full measure of his not inconsiderable diplomatic skills to assuage the situation and get Ramón back on stage. Our final solution was simply to ignore Karajan as much as possible and tap out the rhythm discreetly on one another's palm.

Ramón's many exceptional qualities are a matter of public record and a thrilling memory for anyone who ever witnessed one of his performances in the theatre, or has heard it on record. My own special memories include his



Trademark role... Vinay's Otello at Covent Garden in 1955

remarkable mental dexterity in times of emergency. In one case, he actually took what might have been an embarrassing moment and used his rapid-fire imagination to turn the emergency into a deeply touching theatrical moment. The performance in question was *Otello* at the *Mexico City Opera*, where we were guest artists. In the last act of the opera, I had already been done in by my jealous husband, but found myself lying on the edge of the bed with my arm resting uncomfortably on the wooden bed frame. Under these circumstances, it was a more than daunting challenge to feign death with my arm threatening to jerk involuntarily away from me.

Luckily, Ramón had just begun to sing the final, heart-rending phrases of his farewell to "my" *Desdemona*, and so I was able to whisper to him during one of the musical

pauses: "Ramón, my arm!" His spontaneous reaction, without breaking character or interrupting the flow of music in any way, was to take my hand and arm tenderly to his chest, where he adoringly caressed the allegedly defunct limb in the final throes of his own fading life.

I often wonder how many in the audience, whose smiles of sorrow I could clearly hear from my position on stage, realised that this gesture of sublime devotion had been caused by a cramped arm position and not by the transcendent genius of some producer. It was singing with Ramón Vinay that made me aware how complete the operatic experience could be. We will not see his like again.

Aspid Varnay

Ramón Vinay, operatic tenor and baritone, born August 31, 1912; died January 4, 1995

Ulrich Loewenthal

Seeing ibises

ULTRICH Loewenthal, who has died aged 72, was a philologist, the British Library's senior curator of printed books and an authority on almost everything.

He was one of four children, born in Kiel, Germany, to a Lutheran mother and Jewish father. Three years after the Nazi takeover, he was evacuated to Britain. With the war, he was interned on the Isle of Man and later deported to a Canadian internment camp, where he spent three years developing most of his quality of endurance and a loathing for mashed potatoes.

Taking a modern language degree at Toronto University, he met his Trinidadian wife-to-be, Enid Kelly. They left for Jamaica and Ulrich taught English at Jamaica College, where his students included Stuart Hall. Back in Britain in 1962, he joined the British Museum as a research assistant in the printed book department — a job perfectly suited to his encyclopaedic knowledge of everything from zoology and British birds to African art and world literature.

After his retirement in 1985 he worked on translations and in consultancy but his

linguistic talents were put to full use in his invaluable contribution to a major Italian-based research project, the Renaissance linguistic archive for the Henry Sweet Philological Society.

In retirement he indulged his love of nature, travel and wildlife. A socialist and proto New Man — he took his grandson to a mother and toddler group where, skilfully changing nappies, he was the only male — he was a family man wedged between the Caribbean culture that he loved through his wife and the Europe that shaped his early life. When Enid contracted Alzheimer's four years ago, he retraced with her his steps to Trinidad, to his beloved Caroni mangrove swamp to see the scarlet ibises and egrets.

Composer Barrington Pheasant, one of his several foster children, said he would now have to plug into the Internet to achieve anywhere near the breadth of knowledge that Ulrich possessed.

Betty Loewenthal

Heinz Ulrich Loewenthal, born August 23, 1923; died December 27, 1995

Another Day

January 31, 1915. To Harriet Monroe: Poe is a good enough poet, and after Whitman the best America has produced (probably?). He is a damn bad model and is certainly not to be set up as a model, to anyone who writes in English. Now as to Eliot: "Mr Prufrock" does not "go off at the end". It is a portrait of failure, or of a character which fails, and it would be false art to make it end on a note of triumph. I dislike the paragraph about Hamlet, but it is an early and cherished hit and T.E. won't give it up, and

as it is the only portion of the poem that most readers will like at first reading. I don't see that it will do much harm. For the rest: a portrait satire on fatuity can't end by turning that quintessence of fatuity, Mr P., into a reformed character breathing out fire and ozone... I assure you it is better, "more unique", than the other poems of Eliot which I have seen. Also that he is quite *intelligent* (an adjective which is seldom in my mouth). *Ecce POUND, Selected Letters, New Directions, 1952.*

Birthdays

Prof Sir Eric Ash, electrical engineer, former chief executive, Student Loan Company, 68; Freely Baxendale, QC, Scott inquiry prosecutor, 45; Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, 58; George Benjamin, composer, 36; Prunella Briaire, founder, National Childbirth Trust, 70; Carol Channing, actress, 75; Robert Clatworthy, sculptor, 68; William Croshie, artist, 60; Susan Dobson, magazine editor, 30; Joanne Dray, actress, 78; Lord Nicholas Gordon Lennox, BBC governor, 65; Ofra Harnoy, cellist, 31; Carol Hawkins, actress, 47; Prof Brenda Hoggett (Mrs Justice Hale), divorce reformer and High Court judge, 51; Norman Mailer, novelist, 78; Phil Manzera, rock guitarist, Roxy Music, 36; Rosanne Musgrave, educationalist, 44; Otilie Patterson, jazz singer, 64; Suzanne Pleshette, actress, 59; Jean Simmons, actress, 67; Rev Lord Soper, Methodist leader, pacifist and broadcaster, 93.

Death Notices

ADEBY Mary Elizabeth retired school teacher of 87 Fawcett Street, Waltham, died peacefully 27 of January 1995. Funeral on Friday at West Trinity Church, No 10 Lower Donations for UNICEF and West Trinity Church.

DAVIS Marie Kathleen, On January 25th 1995 aged 72 years peacefully in Lyham St. Anne's and formerly a Head Teacher in Manchester. Service and cremation Park of Crematorium Lyham Friday 2nd of February at 11am. No flowers by request. Enquiries please to Jeffrey Handford, Rose Court Funeral Home, Lyham St. Anne's, tel. 01625 751 011.

JOHNSON Elizabeth Margaret, On January 28th 1995 peacefully in hospital and of London. Obituary and 7 days. Beloved wife of the late Roy, loving mother of Allison and John. Service in back place at All Saints Church Westbury on Friday February 2nd at 10.15am, prior to committal at Agassotti Chapel, Doncaster at 11.00am. Family flowers and sister donations preferred to St. Mary's Crematorium. Donations and enquiries to Carriage Funeral Services, 4 Barton Rd, Swinton, Tel 0167 7949109.

MURRAY, On January 28th 1995, Leo Murray, journalist, in his 86th year. Loving and well-loved husband of Mary, former of Rolla Hill, grandfather of Miss, Felicia and Pascal. Funeral private, memorial meeting to be arranged.

THORP, Robert Charles of Great Cornard, Suffolk, previously of Woking and Gillingham, died quietly January 28th at 81. Husband, socialist and a good dad. Cremation at Merton Road, Colchester, 11.30am Tuesday February 28th. No flowers, but donations to H.F. Holidays Limited, Saffron Walden Road, New.

WISS, Lionel 84, (ex-pharmacist of Longlight) who passed away aged 70 on Friday 27th January, formerly of Longlight, and wife Edith, born David, Jonathan, Alan and John. Funeral on Friday 28th at 11.30am. Donations to St. Paul's Church, Longlight, Essex. Enquiries to 0171 611 9000.

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NOTEBOOK

Unheroic future for group that dazzled



Edited by Alex Brummer

LORD HANSON has not lost his capacity to surprise. His decision to break up the conglomerate he created through an audacious series of takeovers over two decades is one of those rare decisions that did not leak to the stock market first. He has decided to mete out to his own empire the same treatment that he has delivered to many others, including ICI but must have been

aware that if he had not acted now, or in the year or so leading up to his pre-announced retirement in 1997, then a new generation of corporate marauders — egged on by an activist fund manager — might have done it for him. Several factors played a part in what must have been an incredibly difficult decision. The failure to deliver the kind of shareholder value which has always been part of the Hanson creed, was certainly among them. Hanson shares have been among the laggards of the FTSE-100. The yield of 7.5 per cent, better than could be obtained almost anywhere else in the FTSE with the exception of the P&O, signalled a company where the stress factor outweighed the growth opportunities. There has been a genuine attempt in the 1990s to

normalise Hanson, turning it from a dashing corporate buccannier into a staid, natural resources company. But the transition, although sensibly managed, has not excited investor interest. In many ways the conversion of Hanson from a Thatcher-era company, when it could intervene politically in such sensitive issues as the Westland affair and the sale of Powergen, has given way to the greyer, more consolidating and less dashing approach symbolic of John Major. But knowing James Hanson and his strong sense of loyalty, family and tradition it is inconceivable that personal factors have not played a critical part in the decision. The more important of considerations will have been the death of his lifelong business partner, Gordon White, last

year. Both men had long thought that, through careful nurturing of diet and health, it was possible to cheat the ageing process. But Lord White's death, soon after returning from the UK to advise on the purchase of the Eastern Group was a sharp reminder of mortality. He was at James Hanson's side during all the great takeovers of the 1980s, indeed in many such as the landmark SCM deal he was the commander-in-chief. Without him at his side to coax and come up with the most extraordinary of ideas Hanson plc, has become a much duller and emptier place. In fact the break-up decision is the kind of radical change of direction which Lord White would have relished. It also, perhaps, has been

evident to Lord Hanson, that however competent his son, Robert, may have proved in his various roles, he has never delivered in the way his father might have hoped in Europe, the Far East or in charge of takeovers and acquisition. Robert has apparently recognised that he could never inherit control of the group as it was previously constructed — it was simply too large and too powerful and the institutional shareholders would not have it. He has talked of going back to run the family contract transport business in Huddersfield but it is possible to envisage a continuing role for him in a much smaller, more focused and understandable enterprise, perhaps inheriting the chair from his father on retirement as James had

from his own father. Despite its size and reach Hanson has always retained the style of a family company, which can now perhaps be perpetuated. As the details of the split into four baby Hansons emerges at today's annual meeting at the Barbican, there will be no doubt be high hopes that the new Hanson companies, focused on energy, chemicals, tobacco and some traditional low-tech business, such as bricks and property, will — like other famous break-ups such as Rascal, ICI and AT&T in the United States — release a series of dynamic companies from the strait-jacket of common ownership. Certainly, it will help, as the rise in the Hanson share price following the demerger proposal demonstrated. However, as far as can be

told there is no hidden jewel in the Hanson crown. There are growth opportunities, like selling tobacco into the developing world. But, by definition, Hanson has been and remains a low-tech, unexciting collection of businesses, several of which, notably chemicals, are highly cyclical. Others, such as the Eastern Group, which will be linked with Peabody, are highly regulated. There does not appear to be a glamour stock such as Vodafone, an EMI or a Zeneca (now worth more than the whole of ICI before the demerger) ready to spring forth and surprise investors. Instead, the break-up is a sensible, logical move which will create limited increases, rather than huge bonanzas in value. It is not that heroic a future for a group that once dazzled with its bravado.

Hanson follows break-up fashion

Three demergers end 25 years of market raiding

Roger Cowe and Ian King

A HUGE financial and legal exercise began yesterday as the conglomerate Hanson set in motion three demergers which will undo much of what Lord Hanson and White created in 25 years of audacious corporate deal-making. Hanson's announcement follows the fashion for focus which has captured managerial imagination on both sides of the Atlantic and caught up companies as diverse as US communications group AT&T and the British chemical giant ICI. It also continues the strategy pursued by Derek Bonham since he became chief executive in 1982, and which was seen in the dotation last year of US industries, a collection of 34 smaller US businesses part of the group's many acquisitions in the 1970s and 80s. If all goes to plan, and shareholders approve the three spin-offs, they will receive shares in as-yet un-

named companies specialising in chemicals, energy and tobacco. The chemicals company, covering Quantum and SCM, will be a US company quoted on the New York stock exchange. Imperial Tobacco will be quoted in London, while the energy company, including Eastern Electricity and Peabody coal, will float on both London and New York stock markets. Shareholders will also retain their existing shares in Hanson, which will consist of construction materials and construction equipment companies and will retain its UK and US listings. Mr Bonham said yesterday: "The USI demerger demonstrated that increased focus works and I am sure it will work for us." Corporate affairs director Christopher Collins denied the break-up was a reversal of Hanson's 1980s philosophy which created a diversified conglomerate. "It's an obvious continuation of the continuing process of concentrating on fewer, larger businesses, but not a change or reversal, but an evolution to meet the new conditions of the times. It's an extremely interesting, positive evolution." He also said the move was not a defensive measure and was not connected with Lord Hanson's retirement, planned for next year. But City sources noted that the company had been under pressure because of its poor share price performance. One fund manager said: "The company was obviously under pressure from shareholders and institutions to deliver more value to shareholders." John Ainsworth, fund manager with Hill Samuel Asset Management, said: "Clearly Hanson has not been a particularly successful share to hold for years." While Hanson's share price rose by 7p to close yesterday at 21.5p, one analyst queried whether the individual companies would maintain Hanson's recent generosity in dividend payments. And Geoffrey Carrington, a fund manager with Norwich Union, said: "This is not an exercise in value creation." A fund manager commented: "Hanson was a bit like Lomro — one of those sprawling companies where you never knew what was going on. This move should improve clarity and now there will be takeover potential." Meanwhile, Mr Bonham warned that the break-up would take months to engineer. "This is a gigantic exercise and it may take a year to complete," he said.



In focus... chief executive Derek Bonham has pursued a strategy of demerging the group

VIEW FROM THE CITY

F-word replaces the C-word in corporate-speak

Ian King

WHEN is a conglomerate not a conglomerate? The answer, it seems, is when the sector's king is dead. Not one of the companies contacted yesterday, all of which might once have been proud to call themselves conglomerates, was even prepared to use the C-word. They included: Cookson, whose activities sprawl across four distinct sectors, BTR, whose 100 or so companies are active in five areas, and Williams Holdings, whose products range from fire equipment to wood treatment. Several of the companies questioned even balked at the euphemism "diversified industrial" — the term commonly used in the City — emphasising, instead, with all their corporate breath how F for "focused" they now are. A spokesman for Williams, a feared 1980s predator, insisted it could not be called a conglomerate. "We have been concentrating on three core areas for the past five years, where we have leading market positions, and where we expect to make more acquisitions in the future," the spokesman said. And Suter, whose activities include refrigeration, engineering, chemicals and consumer goods, said: "We're too small to demerge. And, in any case,

our main areas fit quite well together." This line was also taken by BTR, whose spokesman said: "Unlike Hanson, we're not so widely diversified, and have been quite seriously focused for a number of years." Another group happy to compare itself with Hanson was Cookson, the electronics, plastics, engineering and ceramics combine. A spokesman said: "Our share price was one of the strongest performing last year, while Hanson's was one of the weakest. We're under no pressure to demerge, as we're already creating enough shareholder value. They were obviously not." One company which has already demerged itself this decade, BAT, was also adamant that it would not be repeating the trick. — Its spokesman, Ralph Edmondson, said: "We're committed to both our tobacco and financial services businesses, and see lots of growth in them." However, the most curious answer came from Bill Turcan, chief executive of Harrison's & Crossfield, the group whose activities cover chemicals, timber and building supplies, food and agriculture and plantations. "I couldn't possibly possibly give you an answer, that we haven't given our shareholders," he said apologetically. "That would be price sensitive information."



'Lord Hanson built a style of doing business which was in keeping with the extravagant 1980s. But it has fallen out of fashion, along with the other components of the superficial, unsustainable boom of that decade'
Hanson, by Alex Brummer and Roger Cowe, 4th Estate, £8.99

OUTLOOK

Dinosaurs on their last legs

Pauline Springett and Roger Cowe

DEMERGER has become the fashion of the 1990s. Just as surely as the 1980s was the era of conglomerate, the 1990s is the era of demerger. To some extent the change is merely a matter of financial fashion, but there is also industrial logic in both approaches. The notion of conglomerates arose because of the vul-

nerability of individual companies to single product or geographic markets. The City hates volatile profits, so companies reacted by spreading their risk, buying companies in different industries or different countries, or usually both. But, by the end of the 1980s, it had become apparent that many conglomerates had not been successful and those, such as Hanson, which did generate huge profits did so largely

through the process of dealing, rather than through improving the performance of the companies they acquired. Once the City fashion turned against them it was difficult for most to continue the buying spree, so they were faced with only one alternative — make the dealing profits they had relied on by selling off what they had, rather than adding to it. Michael Gould, a director at management research and consultancy Ashridge, said yesterday that fashion, and the City's difficulty valuing conglomerates, were the main reasons for the current demerger boom. It can only be a matter of time before other UK conglomerates take the same route. The list of possibilities includes a clutch of well-known names, which has

even included Tomkins. However Tomkins' purchase yesterday of US company Gates Rubber indicates that demerger is not at the forefront of the plans it has at the moment. Chief executive, Greg Hutchings, still believes in the conglomerate approach. He argues that a tough central management, such as his team, can keep companies on their toes much better than remote shareholders, and will therefore achieve better performance. But he hinted that there may be diminishing returns as conglomerates get bigger. "Hanson is much more diversified than we are or ever would be," he said. Of course the UK corporate sector is buzzing with takeovers as well as demergers, as shown with Granada's victory over Forte last week.

Who's next?

- Other candidates for a possible break-up:**
- MAI** — media and money broking
 - BTR** — industrial conglomerate
 - Ladbrokes** — hotels, betting
 - Rank** — leisure and entertainment
 - Pearson** — publishing/entertainment
 - P&O** — property, shipping
 - Trafalgar House** — shipping, construction
 - BAT** — financial services/tobacco
 - Inchcape** — motor distribution and financial services
 - United News** — media, communications
 - Cable & Wireless** — telecommunications, Mercury
 - Grand Metropolitan** — food and spirits
 - Base** — hotels, beer, betting
 - Kingfisher** — retail conglomerate
- But most of these takeovers are between companies which operate in the same business — creating companies of less diversity than Hanson. Older conglomerates may not be dead but they could be on their last legs.

THE HISTORY

Thirty-year saga of empire built on takeover mastery

Roger Cowe

THE break-up of Hanson is a dramatic conclusion to a 30-year story which began with the tiny takeover of an obscure truck company by an even more obscure agricultural supplier. The latter, known as the Wiles Group, bought Oswald Tillotson, which was the main business interest of James Hanson and Gordon White. But in June 1965, the Wiles directors resigned, leaving Hanson as chairman and he brought in Mr White to apply the takeover lessons he had

learned from his friend Jim Slater. The Hanson takeover machine did not really get going until the 1970s, when Mr White departed for the US in disgust at the political chaos in Britain. The feared duo, succeeded with only one hostile takeover bid before their first big UK deal in 1979, when they acquired struggling Lindt's. Before that in the 1960s and 1970s Hanson made a number of agreed takeovers, most significantly in the US. The Lindt's victory brought an astonishing change through the first half of the

1990s, culminating with the acquisition in 1986 of food and tobacco empire Imperial Group in the UK and SCM, the US conglomerate. The two groups cost more than £3 billion but they were the best deals Gordon White ever did for Hanson, as parts of the prey were quickly sold which recouped most of the purchase price while leaving sizeable profit earners within Hanson, such as Imperial Tobacco. The two deals marked the pinnacle of Hanson's fortunes. The group's share price has never regained its standing since that time, and while further deals were done in the next 10 years, they failed to generate the same profits or excitement. Since Derek Bonham took over as chief executive in 1992 the emphasis has been on rolling back the work of the

Win some, lose some

- 1972** — Bid for construction company Costain defeated
 - 1973** — First US takeover, fish processor Seacoast, \$32m
 - 1981** — US conglomerate McDonough bought, \$185m; Berec, owner of Ever Ready batteries, acquired, £95m
 - 1983** — LDS stores group acquired, £250m
 - 1985** — SCM chemical, typewriter, food empires acquired, \$830m; tobacco and food conglomerate Imperial Group acquired, £2.5bn
 - 1987** — Kidde industrial conglomerate acquired, \$1.6bn
 - 1989** — ConsGold mining group acquired, £3.3bn
 - 1990** — Peabody coal acquired, \$1.2bn
 - 1991** — Beaten off by ICI; Beazer construction group bought, £391m
 - 1993** — Quantum chemicals bought, \$3.4bn
 - 1994** — Sold office products, Beazer Homes
 - 1994** — Demerged collection of US businesses
- 1990s, although some tactical takeovers, such as Eastern group, have been made. First, a collection of smaller bus-

VIEW FROM OVER THERE

Wall Street is left gasping by search for 'real value'

Mark Tran in New York

IN AMERICA, the trend towards breaking up conglomerates is still in its infancy. Wall Street was stunned by AT&T's decision to follow the same route. Only five years before, the AT&T chairman, Robert Allen, had led a hostile takeover of the NCR computer company for \$8 billion in his quest to combine communications and computers. NCR turned out to be a millstone around AT&T's neck. The new AT&T will hold on to the long-distance, cellular, credit card and consulting businesses. The other companies are the money-losing computer business and communications equipment manufacturing. "The complexity of trying to manage these different businesses began to overwhelm the advantages of integration," Mr Allen said.

TOURIST RATES — BANK BELLS

Australia 1.97	France 7.42	Italy 2.96	Singapore 2.10
Austria 15.10	Germany 2.750	Malta 0.54	South Africa 5.34
Belgium 44.40	Greece 367.00	Netherlands 2.400	Spain 183.50
Canada 2.02	Hong Kong 11.46	New Zealand 2.22	Sweden 10.57
Cyprus 0.70	India 54.20	Norway 9.56	Switzerland 1.76
Denmark 6.41	Ireland 0.9500	Portugal 226.00	Turkey 90.141
Finland 6.78	Israel 4.73	Saudi Arabia 5.58	USA 1.4700

Supplied by NatWest Bank (excluding Indian rupee and Israeli sheqel)

Big two take another step towards monetary union as UK continues with the debate

Britain may be out in cold if it doesn't sign up, says ex-Bank chief

Larry Elliott
Economics Editor

BRITAIN could be marginalised within Europe if it turns its back on a single currency, the former Governor of the Bank of England, Lord Kingsdown, warned yesterday.

Despite growing doubts on the Continent whether tough conditions for the 1999 deadline could be met, he said the UK could suffer from a devalued currency if it did not join.

He told a House of Lords economic and financial affairs select committee that Britain "until now the destination for more than 40 per cent of inward investment into the European Union — would lose its appeal unless it signed up."

Multinational companies would focus on one headquarters in mainland Europe rather than in the UK. If the Euro takes off, most companies would want to be in Europe, he said.

However, a more cautious approach to monetary union came from two of the Government's leading Euro enthusiasts. Former foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd, said yesterday he did not think monetary union would begin in 1999.

Mr Hurd said what is important is that "those keenest on [monetary union] should now recognise that and not wait for the train to hit the buffers at the beginning of 1998".

Meanwhile, the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, made it clear on BBC Radio that he would oppose Britain's entry if attempts were made to dilute the convergence criteria.



German economic minister Rexrodt (right), finance minister Waigel (centre) and labour minister Blum present their jobs plan PHOTOGRAPH: ROBERTO PERRI

France and Germany unite on economy

Ian Traynor in Bonn and Paul Webster in Paris

GERMANY and France yesterday unveiled "closely co-ordinated" plans to try to kickstart their flagging economies and ensure Europe's two flagship countries meet the entry requirements for monetary union by 1999.

The twin packages, designed to boost employment and consumption, provoked widespread scepticism that they would be enough to gen-

erate the growth needed to reverse the slide in confidence. Although shares in Paris hit an eight-month high, the DAX in Frankfurt dropped 10 points and the mark fell as dealers pointed to the need for a further Bundesbank rate-cut to boost the German economy. Another sharp cut in the key "repo" money market rate is expected today.

Presenting an "action programme for jobs and investment", the German economics, finance, and labour ministers insisted they hoped to trigger an upward swing by

streamlining the complex tax system, offering tax breaks for start-ups, cutting social security spending, and easing access to venture capital.

The four-year programme, likened to a multi-vitamin by economics minister Günter Rexrodt, aims to cut taxes by DM34 billion (£15.4 billion), reverse the exodus of German business to cheaper labour markets abroad, and promote inward investment in the ambitious hope of halving unemployment to two million by the end of the century. But Mr Rexrodt admitted that, with

growth at 1.5 per cent at most this year, unemployment would remain stuck at 10 per cent.

Theo Waigel, the finance minister, said Bonn and Paris had discussed their packages on Monday and agreed to unveil them simultaneously. Three of France's top financial advisers worked alongside their German counterparts in preparing the French package.

The French government's main measure to stimulate spending was a 1 per cent cut in the current 4.5 per cent in-

terest in the most popular state-backed savings scheme, the Livret A. But analysts estimated that only about £300,400 million would be injected into the French economy.

In Frankfurt, analysts and bankers argued that the German government programme amounted to "too little, too late." "It's all very vague, there are so many question-marks about the programme's implementation and it's doubtful whether it will have the desired impact on the labour market," said Holger Fabricius, senior UBS economist.

KPMG ends century of silence

Roger Cowe

KPMG, the accountancy firm, broke with more than a hundred years of tradition yesterday by publishing its annual accounts.

The document, designed to be as close as possible to the report and accounts published by leading public companies, showed that the firm made a profit of almost £18 million in the year to the end of September.

This was 38 per cent down on the previous year's figure, after what senior partner Colin Sharrman described as "pressure on margins". For several years, audit firms

have found it difficult to resist pressure on fees from large companies, which have become readier to shop around for their annual audit. There have also been new competitors in areas like insolvency work, which have cut prices.

Mr Sharrman, whose position is equivalent to the chairman and chief executive of a company, received a total of £740,000 in pay and profit share. His share of the profit, which was divided among the 585 partners, was almost £177,000. Included in his pay was a figure of £125,000 which is required by the partnership agreement to be invested in a pension scheme.

The average KPMG partner was paid £180,000, with a basic salary of £125,000. Staff numbers fell by 2 per cent despite a 7 per cent rise in gross fee income, to £289 million.

Because accountancy firms are partnerships they are not covered by legal requirements on limited companies to publish accounts each year. But KPMG decided last year to create a limited company to carry out audits of public companies, in an attempt to deal with the threat of negligence suits to the partnership which has unlimited liability.

That led to the decision to publish information on the whole UK firm, which is likely to be followed by other big firms. "The new audit company would require financial transparency, but it's not sensible just to tell part of the story," Mr Sharrman said. One difference from conventional accounts is that the figures have not been audited. That will be remedied next year, however. The winner of a tender is likely to come from the second tier of medium-sized firms.

Other members of the Big Six auditors are ruled out because of possible conflicts over litigation.

Mr Sharrman added that coming out into the open had been difficult. "But it's a matter of transparency," he said.

Moscow tops league of most expensive cities

David Hearst in Moscow

UP AND DOWN, one of Moscow's exclusive night clubs, nestles improbably in the foreign businessmen's press centre, the building in which the plotters announced their communist revanchist putsch in August 1991.

The manager languidly recited the price list: a glass of freshly squeezed juice \$70, a swig of cognac \$400, a modest meal for two \$300, a cheeky little bottle of wine \$3,000. Russian television added that a night with a prostitute cost one businessman \$5,000 — after much haggling.

Moscow has just been recognised as the world's most expensive city for a foreign businessman to stay in the world. Eurocost, an organisation backed by the European Commission's statistical office calculated the average cost of 24 hours in Moscow was \$543, the most expensive of 114 world capitals in the survey.

Quite why Moscow should be so expensive, no one can really explain. Is it the presence of a voracious mafia, in comparison with which hyenas are paragons of reticence? Is it the relative dirt of five star hotels or the presence of glibble foreigners with more money than sense? Certainly none of Rus-

sia's new capitalists are complaining at being able to charge \$50 for a 30-kilometre taxi ride from the airport, or even \$85 (per person) just to get through the passport and customs control queues quickly. After all, everything has its price.

The average price of the humblest single-room in a four or five star hotel is currently \$390. Sending a fax to London from the business centre of the Baitshing costs \$14 for the first minute of transmission and \$7 for each subsequent minute. At that rate, it would be cheaper to fly. If Aeroflot frightens you out of your wits, you can always hire your own jet, a 15-seater YAK-40 at only \$1,250 a flying hour.

Falling ill in Moscow is also not advisable. A bed for one night at the Central Clinical Hospital, where president Boris Yeltsin recently spent two months recovering from a heart attack, costs \$200.

A Foreign Office spokesman said it was not unusual for prices in new capitalist countries to go through the roof. He said that with most accommodation in Moscow not up to western standards, hoteliers who had invested in upgraded facilities were able to charge a premium. "They are latching on to capitalism fast".

Rags to riches? Class still counts

WORKFACE/Social mobility is far less common than politicians like to think, say Richard Thomas and Larry Elliott

JOHN Major's vision of a classless Britain is rooted in his ascent from humble beginnings in Brixton to the highest office in the land. But the experience of his opposite number, Tony Blair, the product of a privileged background, is more typical of a society where class still counts.

Research released yesterday by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that despite all the talk of upward mobility and the forging of opportunity societies, the reality is that poor people tend to have poor parents, while the children of the rich do very nicely — even in the absence of impressive academic qualifications.

The IFS based its study on the National Child Development Survey, which followed the progress of a group of people born in a single week in March 1958. It used income and social class to compare how sons had fared next to their fathers.

According to the IFS researchers, sons of managerial or professional fathers are three times more likely to end up in the same social bracket as sons of semi-skilled or unskilled workers.

The same pattern was found with incomes. Slicing the country into five income groups, the IFS showed that more than a third of those making up the richest 20 per cent had fathers who had also been in the most affluent fifth. By contrast, only 10 per cent of Britain's top earners had enjoyed a rags-to-riches rise to prosperity from the lowest quintile.

That is not to say that Britain lacks social mobility, and the IFS stressed that there was no way of telling from the report — based on a single cohort born 37 years ago — whether society was becoming more fluid. However, other research indicates that mobility has increased.

Some people do overcome poor backgrounds to strike it rich, especially those who do well at school. Among those who hailed from what the IFS describes as "disadvantaged" backgrounds who ended up in the top 40 per cent of earners, almost 40 per cent had A-levels or higher qualifications. Just 10 per cent of the upwardly mobile poor left school with no qualifications.

It is also true that some people born with a silver spoon in their mouth slide to

the bottom of the social scale, but as Lorraine Dearden of the IFS put it: "Rags to riches is more common than riches to rags."

Using the same educational yardstick as for the poor, the IFS research showed that while educational attainment still mattered, the sons of rich fathers were able to stay in the same class, however they did at school. Of those who remained in the top 20 per cent income bracket, 33 per cent had fewer than five O-levels and 4 per cent had no qualifications at all.

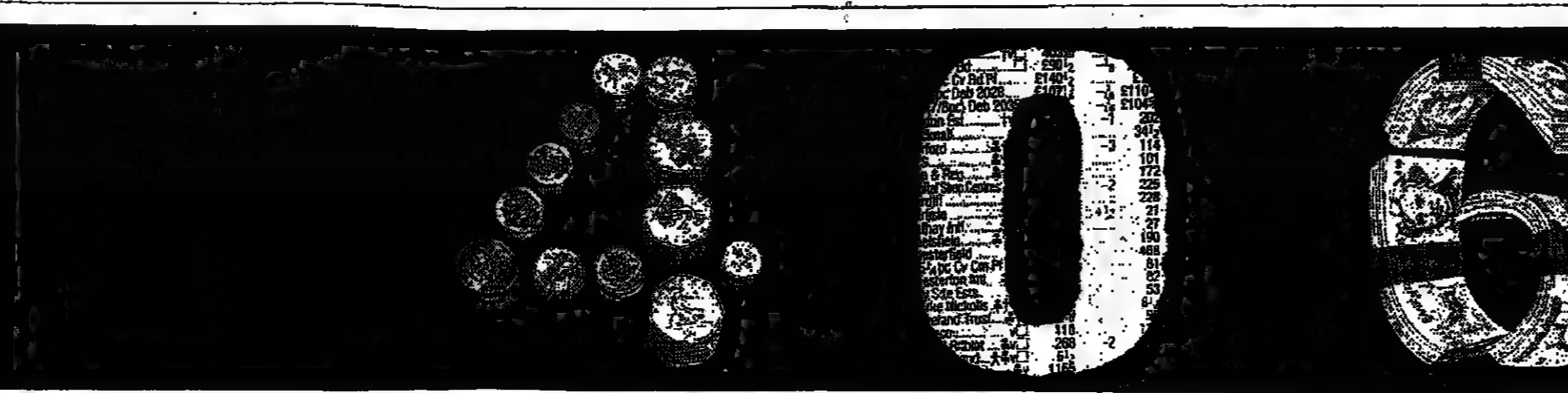
This asymmetry was further illustrated by the maths test results for seven-year-olds. On average, poor children who were later successful

there was a disparity, but it was far smaller. The ones who emulated their fathers' success scored almost seven out of ten, while those who ended up towards the bottom of the pile scored just under six.

The IFS also looked at single mothers, to see if there was a correlation between the status and income of their fathers and the likelihood of them bringing up children alone. It found that there was only the most tenuous of links, although it added that the women in question were surveyed in 1991, when they were 33, and that they might not be representative of those becoming single mothers today.

As a studiously independent research organisation, the IFS is reluctant to draw policy conclusions from its study. However, it is clear that the way to improve the opportunities for the less well-off is through the education system. But even that, in itself, would not be enough to make Britain a truly classless society. Breaking the grip on income and status of the better-off, who are relatively immune to academic failure, is the other half of the equation.

Two Nations? The Inheritance of Poverty and Affluence is available from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7RA. Price £6.



Power crisis inquiries jolt industry

Chris Barrie and Patrick Donovan

THE electricity and gas watchdogs were at loggerheads with industry last night as the two regulators began investigations into the near-collapse of the electricity system earlier this week.

As the National Grid moved to reassure electricity consumers yesterday that power supplies were returning to normal, the gas industry regulator, Clare Spottiswoode, and the electricity regulator, Professor Stephen Littlechild, demanded details of gas supply contracts agreed between British Gas and gas-fired power stations.

The grid came close to ordering black-outs on Monday night after five gas-fired power stations had been forced to shut down due to a shortage of gas. The stations were supplied on "interruptible" contracts, which allows British Gas to cut off supplies when demand for domestic consumers is high.

In a letter sent out yesterday to all major power producers, Dr Brian Wharmby of the Office of Electricity Regulation (Ofreg) said: "I am writing to seek information... about factors which can affect the availability of gas-fired generating plants."

He added: "I wish to know whether your gas supplies are interruptible and, if so, how this relates to the information flow to NCG (National Grid Company) about your availability."

The demand met with incredulity at one large generator, which pointed out that Professor Littlechild's staff was already supposed to hold the information, from earlier scrutiny of generators owned

by regional electricity firms. The generator said the request undermined Ofreg's credibility. Some highly placed industry sources had expressed astonishment that the regulator needed to ask for "basic information".

Ofgas said that it had ordered Transco, the British Gas division responsible for transmitting gas, to supply details of contracts with other shippers and commercial users.

Ofgas is understood to have overruled Transco's claim that the details are confidential. The watchdog said it was concerned to establish what role British Gas played in selecting firms and regions for supply cuts.

Transco has maintained throughout the crisis that the need to maintain a balanced system is the only criterion at issue in selecting firms for cuts. But an Ofgas official said yesterday: "We find that Transco does have a duty here... (The cuts) may be done on a localised basis, but (Transco) cannot say they are not involved."

The National Grid said it would conduct an internal review of the events of the last week. Problems over gas supply contracts and power generators were a matter for British Gas and the owners of the generating stations.

The trade and industry department said it was monitoring Ofreg's inquiry but added that it was too early to say whether changes would be needed to ensure gas-fired stations had priority in receiving gas over other commercial users.

The Pool, which runs the system through which electricity is traded, said yesterday that power prices had soared under the spur of near-record demand.

News in brief

Pearson set for £46m takeover of SelecTV

PEARSON, the media combine whose businesses include Madame Tussauds and the Financial Times, yesterday announced a \$46 million recommended cash offer for SelecTV, the independent television production company whose shows include Lovejoy and Birds of a Feather. Pearson already owns Thames Television, producer of The Bill, and Grundy Worldwide, which makes Neighbours. Pearson is selling on SelecTV's stake in Meridian, the ITV company for the south of England, to MAL, the media-to-broking group which already owns a majority stake in the station, for £30 million. In a separate deal SelecTV, which used to be owned by Robert Maxwell, has sold its cable television business to Carlton, the London weekday TV contractor, for £5.2 million. — Ian King

Alliance to become bank

BRITAIN'S fourth biggest building society, the Alliance & Leicester, will today announce plans to become a bank, so ending its 100-year-old society status. More than 3 million society members will benefit from a £2.5 billion share bonanza when the society joins the stockmarket next year. But a million current account customers will be excluded from bonuses of around £1,000 each. The Alliance has long been tipped as a favourite for conversion into a bank, and was considered the most likely candidate to beat the Abbey National to this status, when it converted in 1989. However, commercial lending losses in the late 1980s put the plans on ice. — Teresa Hurter

Germans eye chemists

GEHE, the German pharmaceuticals group which is Europe's biggest drugs wholesaler, confirmed yesterday that it is considering a counter-bid for Lloyds Chemists, a fortnight after rival drugs group Unichem announced a £514 million agreed bid for Lloyds. GEHE snapped up British drugs wholesaler AARI for £400 million last May. Lloyds shares, which were valued at 386p by Unichem's cash-and-shares offer, have raced to a year's high of 450p. — Ian King

Tomkins purchase agreed

TOMKINS has finalised the purchase price for Gates Rubber, the world's largest automotive belts and hoses company, at £783.1 million. The payment will be in preferred stock and has been agreed two weeks after the deal was first announced. The privately-owned Gates now joins the Tomkins stable, which includes Rank Hovis bread and cakes and the Smith & Wesson handguns company. Tomkins released figures showing profits in the first nine months of 1995 at \$85.5 million (£57 million). — Tony May

Phone firm's Canadian deal

BRITAIN'S sole municipal telephone company, Kingston Communications based in Hull, is establishing its first North American base with a £1 million acquisition of the Canadian testing facility Certelcom. Executives said yesterday the alliance would encourage mutual growth in the expanding European and North American markets. — Martin Halsall

Brokers' Railtrack contract

THE Government will today take another step towards the £2 billion privatisation of Railtrack by announcing that Merrill Lynch and UBS have beaten off stiff competition to become global managers for the International sell-off. Both brokers won the contract after 16 investment banks pitched for one of Europe's biggest privatisation opportunities. They will work under SBC Warburg, in overall charge of the sell-off. — Patrick Donovan

Vertical text on the right edge of the page, including "Baile", "Chris", "nto A", "Results", "RACEL", and other fragments.

Water crisis
Inquiries
industry
...
on set for £46m
...
to become bank
...
purchase agreed
...
Railtrack contract

Athletics

Bailey books Christie into Atlanta

Richard Williams hears Canada's world champion up the Olympic ante

DON'T watch Linford's lips, Donovan Bailey said yesterday. Watch his feet. And check the stopwatch. Because Christie is only fooling when he says he won't be in Atlanta this summer. Just as he was fooling, according to Bailey, when he collapsed on the track in the final of the World Championships last year.

Christie won two races in Australia at the weekend during his winter training programme, then fended off inquiries about his intentions, saying that he was tired of being asked about the Olympic Games and had made no decision yet on whether to defend his title, at the age of 26.

But Bailey, who relieved Christie of one title at the World Championships in Sweden, is confident that when he lines up for the 100 metres final in July, the Olympic champion will be alongside him in the blocks.

"Linford is bluffing you guys," the Canadian sprinter said in London yesterday. "Whatever he's telling you, he'll run. It doesn't matter how old he is. He ran 9.97 at the end of last season. The other day in Australia he ran 10 seconds flat. If you can do that, it wouldn't matter if you were 85 years old."

"You talk to any of the sprinters. None of us thinks Linford won't show up. Ask a sprinter from one of the smaller countries, a guy who might be running 10.6 right now. Ask him whether he'd expect a guy who's running 10 flat to be there."

And, perhaps as part of the psychological build-up to Atlanta, Bailey pointed out that the sprinter who caused the injury which saw Christie and the final in Gothenburg lying on the track clutching his

hamstring and gesturing for attendants to apply ice-packs.

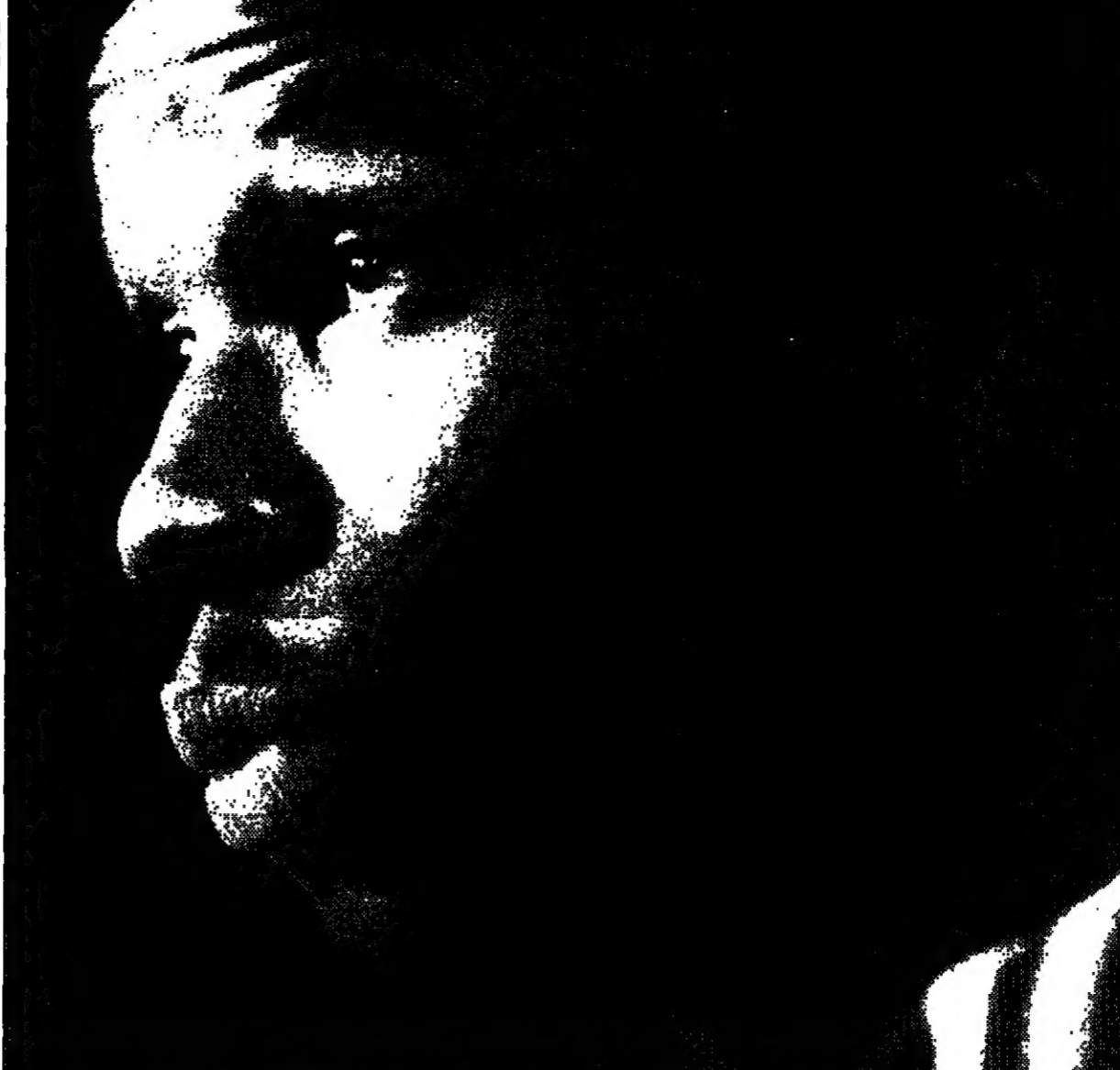
"A fit Linford Christie ran that race," Bailey said. "He was first out of his blocks but he was overtaken. You watch it again. He was back in the village a couple of days later ready to run the relay if your guys (Bailey) were going to make the final. A short time later he ran 10.03 in Zurich. Me and my coach and the other competitors know that no one in the final was injured. Just watch the video."

Bailey's agent, Sue Barrett, immediately denied the allegations. "They are totally without foundation," she said. "Donovan ought to be careful about what he's saying. It was a genuine injury. Linford was to Zurich for treatment and if necessary the specialist he saw will confirm it. It looks like a bit of a publicity stunt."

Like Christie, Bailey was born in Jamaica, where he spent his early life before his family moved to Canada. At 28 he is eight years younger than the man whose world title he took in Gothenburg. And yesterday he was distinctly unfazed by the high proportion of questions he was invited to answer on Christie. "I have great respect for the man," he said. "This is his country so of course the question is going to come up."

Bailey is based in Austin, Texas, but has family in Crofton, Ontario, as well as in Canada. He expects a high-quality race in Atlanta, with the United States out to regain their sprint supremacy. "I think the Americans are going to be sending three guys who're really smoking," he said. "But I'm not fearful of any of them."

He was in London yesterday, along with the Cuban long jumper Ivan Pedroso and the German discus thrower Lars Riedel, to present a pre-Olympic television advertising campaign mounted by the sports marketing company, introduced by Al Oerter, the American discus champion who won four con-



Eyes on the Games... Bailey believes he has nothing to fear from his rivals this summer

secutive Olympic gold medals between 1966 and 1968, the campaign also features the Algerian middle-distance runner Noureddine Morceli and three more Cubans, the runner Ana Fidella Quirot, heavyweight boxer Felix Savon and high jumper Javier Sotomayor, plus filmed reconstructions of the triumphs of Jesse Owens, Wilma Rudolph, Bob Beamon and Teofilo Stephenson.

If Bailey's allegations represented the opening shot in the fight for the Olympic 100 metres gold medal, then these TV commercials comprise Auld's first broadside in its private competition with

Nike, its American rival — the billion-dollar battle to use the coming summer's images of sporting excellence to get shoes moving at record speed, not on the track but out of the shops.

Nike, its American rival — the billion-dollar battle to use the coming summer's images of sporting excellence to get shoes moving at record speed, not on the track but out of the shops.

Boxing

Middleweight spotlight dims as Woodhall defends European title against Wormald

Jack Messark

THE novel super-middleweight division has major good money for Chris Eubank and Nigel Benn but seriously devalued the middleweights, once the glamour division of British boxing.

British middleweight champions from Randolph Turpin

to Tony Sibson could draw big crowds, even to their domestic title defences, yet tonight's promoter Mordaunt has a major fill at London arena for a European championship contest between two English middleweights.

Richie Woodhall (Telford) thus gives Derek Wormald (Rochdale) his big chance at the Aston Villa Leisure Cen-

tre, where turnstile takings will not be helped by tonight's Premiership match between Aston Villa and Liverpool at nearby Villa Park.

Times was when the European Boxing Union would have overruled an all-British line-up unless the challenger was Europe's undisputed top contender, which Wormald most certainly is not. Now 30,

he took a three-year sabbatical after losing to Gary Stretch for the British light-middleweight championship in October 1989 and comes to this fight with a 20-1-3 record and a moderate form-guide of two draws and a points win.

He does, however, punch hard enough to make this fight a risk for Woodhall, who is hoping to challenge Quincy

Taylor of the United States for the WBC title.

Duff realises this, but insists that his opponent is a fighter who works while he waits for the world title. He's the champion and has got to make defences. Even if he has another couple of fights before Taylor, he'll get there.

Robert McCracken, Birmingham's Commonwealth

middleweight champion, was to have met Worcester's Paul Busby on tonight's undercard but has kidney trouble serious enough to require urgent surgery.

Paul Weir has been offered a rematch with South Africa's WBO light-flyweight champion Baby Jake Matlala, who beat the Scot by a cut-eye stoppage last November.

Racing

Smith's Band Mrs P's dark horse

Chris Hawkins

THAT Jenny Pitman is a jumping trainer of sub-bumper calibre is in doubt and her Cheltenham Gold Cup-Grand National record places her third behind the great Vincent O'Brien and Fred Rimell in the post-war hierarchy.

O'Brien's record of four Gold Cups and three Nationals will probably stand forever, while Rimell's score of two Gold Cups and four Nationals is a wonderful testimony to his wily skills.

Mrs Pitman has so far won six minutes or so in her career, but she has had three horses pass the post first at Aintree — Esha Ness winning "the race that never was" in 1993.

She readily admits that the minutes or so it takes to run the National leaves her a physical wreck, but she cannot resist its challenge and at the moment Christopher Mordaunt, the British Horseracing Board's chief executive, is grappling with no less than five Pitman entries — Royal Athlete, Lusty Light, Superior Finish, Smith's

Band and Do Be Brief — for this year's race.

Mordaunt will reveal his thoughts on the weights and has virtually come to his conclusions; only Saturday's Coral Grand National Trial at Cheltenham, Sandown's Agfa Diamond Chase and the Hennessy Gold Cup at Leopardstown on Sunday remain to influence him.

Mrs P's Superior Finish is currently 20-1 with Coral's for the Martell National and whether he wins at Cheltenham or Saturday will probably have little bearing on the weight he is allocated at Aintree.

At the moment he is officially rated at 144, which puts him 11lb behind Master Oats, who will almost certainly get top weight in the National.

Last year, out of the same mark, Master Oats had 11lb at Aintree, which means, if Mordaunt follows the same principle, that any horse rated more than 144lb inferior to him will be out of the handicap proper.

So, as things stand at the moment, Superior Finish, will not have more than 10

stones in the National. Last year (when carrying 15lb more than his true handicap weight) he unsettled Peter Nielsen at the tenth.

This season he looks an improved horse, having won the Anthony Midday at Sandown last month, and there is no doubt his stamina for Aintree.

If Mordaunt does not give Master Oats top weight it will be because the gelding is beaten a long way at Leopardstown on Sunday by Jodami, currently rated 14lb inferior to him. Jodami seems to love Leopardstown and will be trying for his fourth successive Hennessy win there, but he will need to beat Master Oats comprehensively to be rated above him.

Young Hustler is 14-1 favourite for the National and will be watched with interest if he turns out for the Agfa Chase at Sandown.

Last year's winner, Royal Athlete, although he is now 13 years old, is a 25-1 chance and at the moment Mrs Pitman has every intention of running him again. The "dark horse" among her entries is Smith's Band, although book-

ies are taking no chances with this second-season gelding who is 20-1.

Smith's Band jumped round Haydock with aplomb when just touched off by Scottie Banks last month and looks a real Aintree type. Like Superior Finish, he will not get much weight and is likely to be out of the handicap.

Adrian Maguire hopes to ride out tomorrow as the prelude to a quicker-than-expected return to the saddle. His damaged left knee, injured in a pile-up at Leicester last week, has recovered so quickly that he is considering riding at Sandown on Saturday.

It was initially feared he faced six weeks off, taking him dangerously close to missing another Cheltenham Festival.

"I think it was made out to be more than it was," said Maguire yesterday. "The leg is improving very quickly and I feel very good. I can't say now that I will be riding on Saturday but we will see how things come along. I will speak to Dr Michael Turner and ride if he approves and I feel up to it."

Wolverhampton (All-Weather Flat) with form

2.10 British Flat
2.40 Sir Tasker
2.10 Field Of Vision

2.10 CHIVE MAIDEN HANDICAP (10) 20.00
101 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
102 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
103 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
104 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
105 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...

2.40 WESTMAN WAGON (weap)
4.10 Myrtle Tempo
6.40 Bertram Law (nb)

2.10 CHIVE MAIDEN HANDICAP (10) 20.00
106 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
107 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
108 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
109 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
110 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...

2.10 CHIVE MAIDEN HANDICAP (10) 20.00
111 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
112 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
113 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
114 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
115 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...

Results

LINGFIELD
1.40 (9) 9, HEVER GOLF STAR, J
2.10 (9) 9, HEVER GOLF STAR, J
3.40 (9) 9, HEVER GOLF STAR, J

2.10 (9) 9, HEVER GOLF STAR, J
3.40 (9) 9, HEVER GOLF STAR, J
4.10 (9) 9, HEVER GOLF STAR, J

4.10 (9) 9, HEVER GOLF STAR, J
5.40 (9) 9, HEVER GOLF STAR, J
6.40 (9) 9, HEVER GOLF STAR, J

Jumping still out in the cold

THE meetings at Windsor and Leicester today have been called off because of frost, while tomorrow's programmes at Towcester and Sedgfield are in doubt. Both courses inspect this morning.

There is still snow at Kelso and Chipping, also due to race on Saturday, report some frozen patches but no inspection is planned.

4.10 WINTER HANDICAP (10) 20.00

4.10 WINTER HANDICAP (10) 20.00
116 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
117 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
118 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
119 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
120 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...

3.10 ROBERTA HANDICAP (10) 20.00

3.10 ROBERTA HANDICAP (10) 20.00
121 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
122 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
123 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
124 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...
125 05-0-2 SPURRY (11) (9) D Colgrave 4-6-10 ... 10 ...

WOLVERHAMPTON
RACECOURSE
101 201 301
120 220 320
122 222 422

● Blinkered today for the first time: 2.10 Wolverstone Hall, Considerable Charm.

Soccer

Martin Thorpe finds the fund of goodwill running out for the troubled Ray Wilkins

Why Mr Nice Guy is now the loneliest Ranger

THE problem is that he is so nice. Not that being nice should be a problem. But when your team are starting to lose...

at Loftus Road, and according to Thomas the feeling is growing in the seats that Wilkins is not the man for the hottest one of all.



Wilkins... curious buys



Zelic... began three games

find a winning blend from his limited resources by consistently changing the team's line-up and system. But his critics call that "not knowing his best side" and disrupting any chance of forging an understanding.

John Mullin offers a sympathetic ear as the promotion-challenging Allan McGraw laughs off suggestions that he is the sickest football manager in Britain

Medicine man weaves spell over Morton

HE IS a phenomenon. Two dozen operations on his shattered knees, with leg amputation a constant threat; his gall bladder removed; a duodenal ulcer diagnosed at that operation...



Field work... Allan McGraw plots St Mirren's downfall tonight as he assesses his way round Cappielow Park

him he would lose his legs after two knee replacements. His left knee is on its fourth; the right its second.

wanted to keep playing. and I never really thought about the consequences. "I think I'm lucky. I've a job I love doing at a club I love. They have been good to me. It's the people here, the supporters. It's a magic we place. Working with young people keeps me young. It's what I live for."

Refuseniks still top England list

Martin Thorpe

THE FA's king-makers met, appropriately, for 90 minutes yesterday to compare notes on where they have got to in choosing the next England manager.

sub-committee yesterday. According to Wiseman, no decisions on the men the committee would consider had been made prior to the meeting.

John Mullin offers a sympathetic ear as the promotion-challenging Allan McGraw laughs off suggestions that he is the sickest football manager in Britain

Powell joins Derby drive

Russell Thomas

DERBY County's manager Jim Smith has reinforced his team's impressive push for the Premiership by signing Chris Powell from Southend for £200,000.

think I will have long to wait." Powell's arrival may speed the departure of Shane Neilson; the out-of-favour defender is having talks with West Bromwich.

Coar denies Batty move Early return for Gillespie

THE England midfielder David Batty was training with Blackburn's first-team squad yesterday as his chairman hit back at speculation that he was leaving Ewood Park for Newcastle United.

THE Newcastle winger Keith Gillespie, who has not played since tearing a thigh muscle on December 27, hopes to be back in action a week on Saturday for the derby game with Middlesbrough at the Riverside.

Sailing

New York want cup back

Bob Fisher in New York

THE New York Yacht Club, the holders of the America's Cup for 125 of its 145 years, are making an all-out attempt to win back the trophy when it is next contested, in Auckland in 2000.

venue. This is what the multi-millionaire Bill Koch wanted from the San Diego Yacht Club after his successful defence in 1992, but the cup-holding club refused. Koch then reduced his technological spending and backed an all-women's team which commanded considerable commercial sponsorship to pay for its own effort to defend, albeit unsuccessfully.

Results

Table with columns for Soccer, Snooker, Tennis, and other sports results.

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York want cup back

Rugby Union Wales put their trust in youth

Robert Armstrong

WALENS have thrown down the gauntlet to England by pairing Arwel Thomas and the uncapped Robert Howley in a new half-back partnership for Saturday's Five Nations meeting at Twickenham.

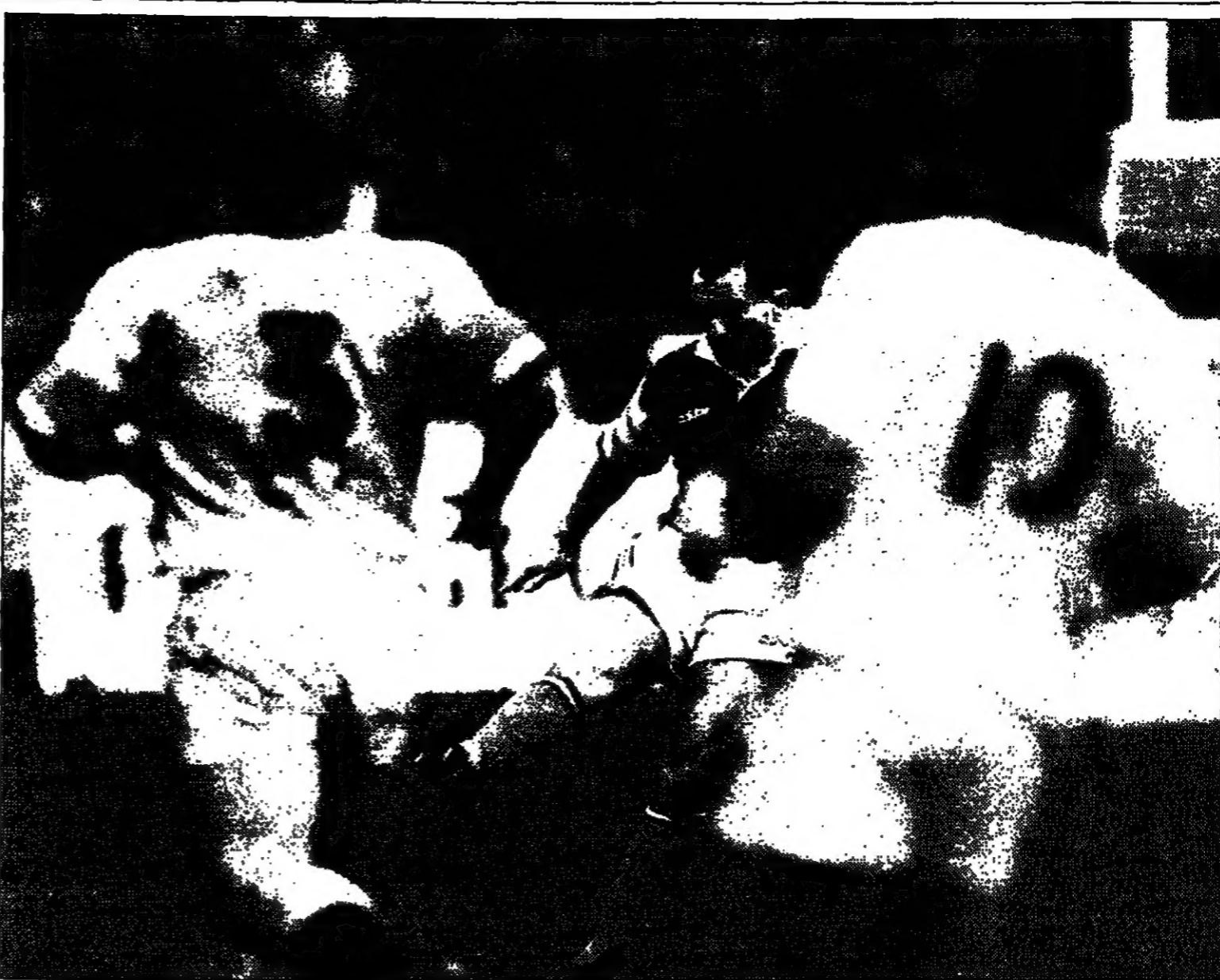
It will be the first championship game for both players, whose surprise selection together represents a clear and potentially exciting statement of intent by Wales's coach Kevin Bowring. Howley, the 25-year-old Bridgend scrum-half and captain, has risen through the ranks, representing Wales at Schools, Students and A Level under the approving eye of Bowring, who was appointed coach last month. Thomas, the 21-year-old Bristol fly-half, made a sparkling international debut two weeks ago, scoring 16 points in the 31-26 victory over Italy at the Arms Park.

Thomas and Howley have been given the formidable task of imposing an expansive 15-man game on England, whose own efforts to achieve an adventurous style have produced little this season. The ambitious tyros will have the Test experience of Ieuan Evans and Wayne Proctor to draw upon, not to mention that of the 30-year-old Llanelli centre Nigel Davies, who is recalled to the side in his clubmate Matthew Wintle.

Bowring has kept faith with the Cardiff hooker Jonathan Humphreys, who will lead the side in his first appearance at Twickenham. Neil Jenkins, who won 29 of his 38 caps at fly-half, will be on the bench along with Andy Moore, the Cardiff scrum-half whom Howley has ousted. Gareth Thomas, the Bridgend utility back, has been drafted in as another replacement.

Bowring emphasised the need for his side to improve upon the flexible pattern of play we showed against Italy," which produced three tries and encouraging signs that the pace of the backs would be utilised. "I hope England will buy into that and play the expansive game that have talked about," he said.

He acknowledged that his imaginative young side would be playing against an established team at Twickenham, where Wales have not won since 1988. "Still, I am not sure the England back row has a lot of pace; we have been working on certain areas and we'll be trying to exploit their weaknesses," added Bowring, who has closely studied the video of England's 15-12 defeat by France.



Tactical master... Thierry Lacroix puts England on the back foot at the Parc des Princes with another well-judged kick

Lacroix cures French headache

Ian Borthwick on the fly-half who has been forgiven by the selectors and is taking up permanent residence at No. 10

FOR a number of years the position of fly-half, indeed the half-back combination, has been a major headache for France as they have failed to maintain any regularity or consistency of performance. Since 1991 Didier Camberero, Alain Penaud, Pierre Montlaur, Franck Mangel, Laurent Mazas, Christophe Deylaud and Yann Delagave, have all won caps at No. 10.

But Thierry Lacroix, the 28-year-old physiotherapist from Dax, has set himself a challenge since his return to the national team. He has both the character and the physical and technical qualities to impose himself in this new position," said Jo Maso, the team manager.

Having played 36 games for France, Lacroix is better known as a centre and a precision goalkicker who was at his best in last summer's World Cup in South Africa, where he finished top scorer of the competition with 112 points. Often playing in the shadow of the great Philippe Sella, he now wants to make a new name for himself as a top-flight fly-half.

"I am 28 years old now and feel totally at ease with controlling and taking on all the responsibilities of the position. That's what I like about it. I like putting myself under pressure," he says. "I have always felt, deep down, that inside fly-half is my position." Apart from the recent England match and two earlier caps as a replacement, Lacroix has played three times at fly-half, the second Test against Australia in 1989, the

World Cup to play for Natal, walked straight into the side at fly-half and played a key role in Natal's victory over Western Province in the Currie Cup final by scoring 20 of their 25 points. That South African experience was enormously beneficial for me, it enabled me to concentrate solely on my game and to gain confidence in my own ability," he explains.

Despite the success, and the evident popularity of the two Frenchmen in Natal, the reception back home from international rugby for a month and from First Division club rugby for three months.

Consequently Lacroix missed the two Tests against New Zealand in November, did not play for the Dax first XV until December 17, and managed only three games before meeting England. "You quickly forget things if you're not playing at the top level. I was a bit rusty and I think it showed in my first game back. I've also forgotten the ban. I've forgotten, but I haven't forgiven," he says.

Both Jack Rowell and France's coach Jean-Claude Skrela were quick to note Lacroix's influence on France's performance against England, for although he missed two penalties and one important touch kick his tactical sense and precision kicking had the English continually under pressure.

Only John Smith's bitter

David Hopps on a historic and happy get-together at Headingley

THE official conjuring of Leeds's rugby union and rugby league clubs duly took place at Headingley yesterday and there were no immediate signs of impending doom. The pigeons continued to flutter over the Town Hall, the River Aire failed to run red with the blood of traditionalists and there was not the slightest sound of clashing ideologies.

A century after the splitting of the two rugby codes, with the breakaway of the Northern Union, the first ground-sharing arrangement between union and league clubs was celebrated in a remarkably sanguine atmosphere. One advertising hoarding did mention John Smith's Bitter, but so far as anyone knew he was the only one.

Leeds have negotiated a five-year lease to play their first XV union matches at Headingley, and plans are afoot for a centre of rugby excellence a couple of miles up the road. There were vast hints on both sides that the clubs are not averse to player sharing, which would take the agreement into further uncharted territory.

"We would be interested in an exchange of players," joked Mike Palmer, a response befitting the chairman of a League Four union club. In truth, with £2 million at their disposal, Leeds's ambitions far outweigh their present standing. It is difficult to see how they can lose from a decade of rugby. These steps ensure that Leeds is at the forefront for change."

Harry Jepson, a former chairman of Leeds Cricket Football and Athletic Community, provided a graceful uncertainty: "Lord, we are gathered here today after a century of separation. May we be ever mindful of your great mercies and thank you for what we are about to receive."

Ireland get shirty with Francis

Karl Johnston

NEIL FRANCIS has been disciplined by Ireland's selectors, the team manager Pat Whelan confirmed yesterday.

The penalty, believed to be a fine, was imposed after the lock appeared at training last week in a shirt that bore the logo of the International Board, which will consider a batch of law changes at its annual meeting in Bristol today. One of 37 suggestions is that all eight forwards until the ball is cleared in order to enable backs to engage in direct combat without the interference of back-row men.

Francis was seen wearing a T-shirt with the logo of a building company. It contravened an agreement reached with the Irish Permanent Building Society, which has become the first sponsor to have its logo on the shirts of a side in the Five Nations. Ireland's governing body, the International Board, will consider a batch of law changes at its annual meeting in Bristol today. One of 37 suggestions is that all eight forwards until the ball is cleared in order to enable backs to engage in direct combat without the interference of back-row men.

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Norman in row with Tour over appearance money limits

David Davies

GREG NORMAN, never worried about peering over the parapet, has taken the fight to the enemy over something which officially does not exist.

Norman, in Perth, Western Australia, for the Heineken Classic, is to discuss with Ken Schofield, the executive director of the PGA European Tour, the subject of appearance money. The Australian will talk to blunt terms about discrimination and restraint of trade.

Rugby League Currie in the hot seat

Paul Fitzpatrick

TONY CURRIE, who played for Leeds for two seasons in the Eighties, is London Broncos' surprise choice as coach in succession to Gary Grixon, who was sacked last week.

Currently a specialist defensive coach with the Brisbane Broncos, London's owners - Currie takes up his duties next month. For tonight's fourth-round Challenge Cup tie at Dewsbury, the side will be prepared by three senior players in Terry Matterson, Tony Rae and Kevin Langer.

Snooker New triumph in the year Dott

Clive Everton

GRAEME DOTT, the Welsh Scot of Hamilton continued to run by heat. Dott's victory over Monday No. 6, points Higgins not pot.

Teamtalk

The Independent News Reports Service
Call 0891 33 77+

Aston Villa	06	Leeds United	09	Sheffield United	14
Birmingham	11	Leicester City	03	Sheffield Wed.	14
Blackburn	27	Liverpool	04	Stoke City	20
Bolton	26	Manchester City	02	Sunderland	27
Brentford	24	Manchester United	01	Tottenham Hot.	07
Burnley	21	Middlesbrough	22	West Ham	22
Chelsea	08	Middlesbrough	22	Wimbledon	28
Coventry City	17	Newcastle Utd	16	Wolves	37
Darby County	28	Norwich City	18	Cardiff	09
Everton	05	Nottingham Forest	13	Rangers	10
Huddersfield	32	QPR	25		

Motor racing's spy in the cockpit, page 13
The sickest manager in football, page 14

King-makers draw up England shortlist, page 14
Wales go for high-risk option, page 15

Sports Guardian

MURDOCH'S TELEVISION BID FOR GAMES REJECTED BY IOC
£961m bid wins Olympics for BBC

Andrew Cuff
Media Correspondent

THE BBC was celebrating last night after an audacious bid by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation to seize exclusive European television rights to the Olympic Games of the year 2000 was rejected.

pean Broadcasting Union was accepted by the International Olympic Committee for the summer and winter games until 2006, even though Murdoch had offered to pay about \$340 million more.

fightback against the increasing encroachments of Sky Sports and Murdoch's powerful cheque-book. Jonathan Martin, the BBC's beleaguered head of sport, told Radio 5 Live: "I think it will get three cheers from sports fans everywhere."

£1.3 billion (£3 billion) from Murdoch. Martin added: "Samaranch stuck resolutely to the view, enshrined in the IOC's Charter, that the Olympics should continue to be seen by the largest possible number of viewers worldwide."

coverage and universal access well into the 21st century. Jean-Pierre Julian of the EBU, which represents 65 broadcasters in 49 countries across Europe and was praised by the IOC for its technical expertise, said it was a victory for public service broadcasting. "It is terrific news, but we were pretty confident. We consider sports as a public service," Murdoch planned to buy

the rights and then re-sell them. In Britain coverage would have been shared between Sky Sports and a terrestrial broadcaster. A spokesman for News Corporation said: "We respect the right of any sports body to select the broadcaster of its choice. Rights-holders are well able to make their own decision with regard to the relative merits of financial bids and the extent and quality of coverage."

Women at risk in stalkers' fantasy league



Vincent Hanna

Ever since found a stalker living in the wardrobe of her rented house at Wimbledon. She got a court order and the incident was hushed up. "It happens to all the leading players," she said.

"Theo Dunkleberg followed Huber for months. Kurt Zuydam used to sleep in a car outside Steffi Graf's house. Michael Salata was convicted twice of harassing her. And Günther Parche ran on to the court at Hamburg and stabbed Seles for displacing his heroine Steffi as world No. 1.

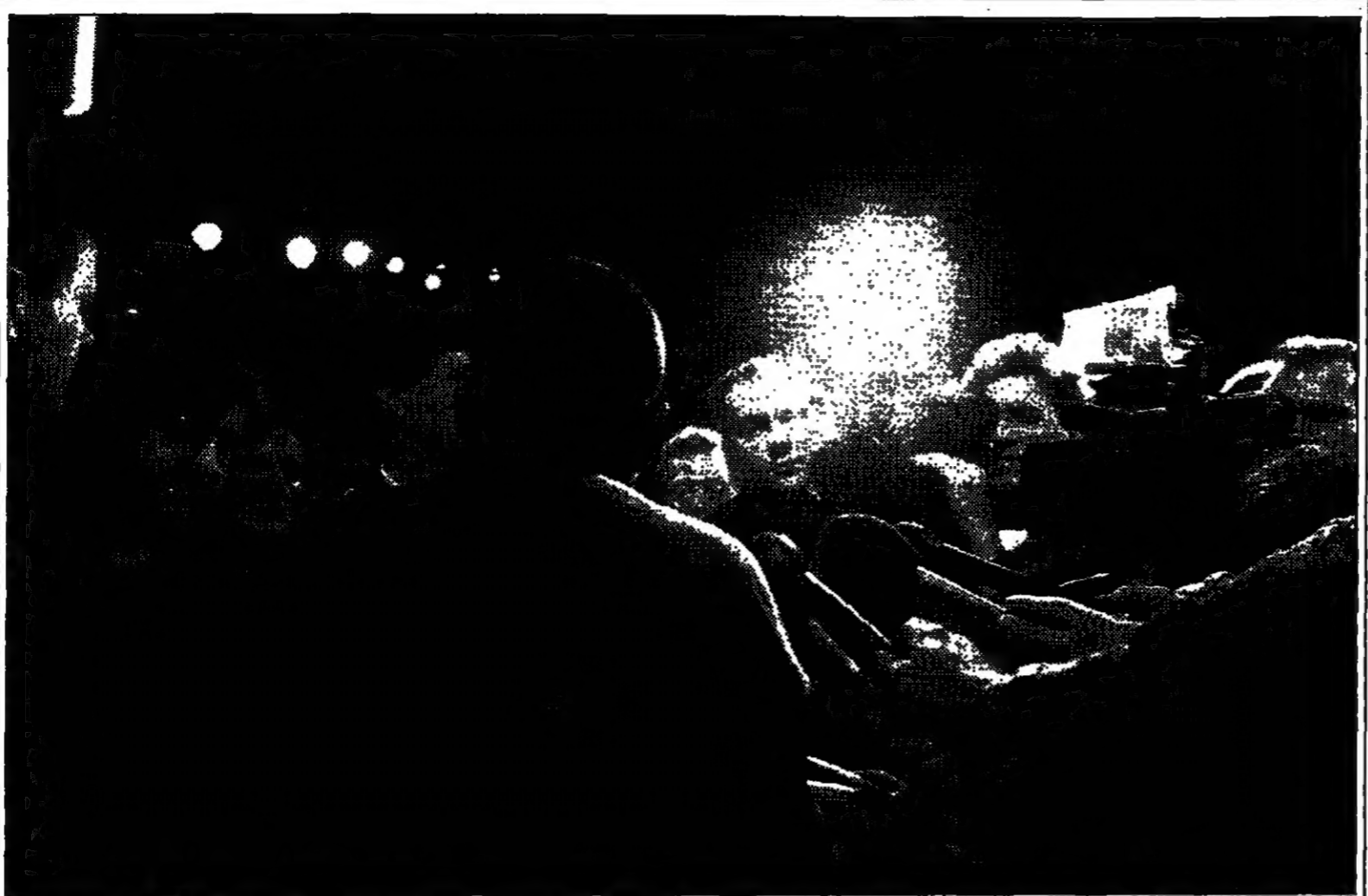
"What is it about the sport that attracts such people? My psychologist friend wished to remain anonymous. The psychiatrist did not. For openers it is the players. The potential targets are all young women, dressed to some provocative. Then there is the accessibility. The public can get closer to tennis players than to any other stars. At Wimbledon on the outside courts the competitors sit almost in your lap.

"Look at the structure of the court itself," the psychologist told me. "The players are boxed-in, confined, vulnerable. The obsessive fan can imagine that they are playing for him. "Above all," she said, "there is the length of the matches. Where else can the obsessive get close access to young, fit, scantily clad women for two to three hours at a time? They develop what they think is an empathy with their victim."

DREW MOONIE MP, shadow Sports Minister and a psychiatrist, agreed. "Stalkers are usually inadequate people who develop a fantasy relationship. They see the player's face often on TV and feel as if they know them. It can be dangerous, especially for young women. Tournament organisers must settle security procedures with the tennis authorities and stick to them. It is a phenomenon not unlike the hero worship of film stars in the Thirties. Except that the studios knew how to protect their property. The Women's Tennis Association has a list of blacklisted fans who have a record of stalking and whom it wishes to ban. It recently hired security consultants to advise on the problem. But as it ruefully admits, it is in the hands of tournament organisers. Brenda Perry, the WTA tour director at Melbourne, was kept in the dark about the Seles threat. "This is what the world is coming to," said Marina Navratilova, who has had her share of stalkers. "These are just games we are playing. This is not a matter of life and death." I hope she's right.

Bailey whips up Christie storm

LINCOLN CHRISTIE was yesterday accused of feigning injury to cover up certain defeat in the final of last year's 100 metres world championship in Gothenburg. The astonishing claim was made by Donovan Bailey, the Canadian who succeeded him as champion. Bailey said that "absolutely no one was injured in that race", even though the Briton finished flat on his back clutching his hamstring after finishing sixth. "A fit Lincoln Christie ran that race," said Bailey. "He was first out of his blocks but was overtaken. You watch it again."



Quick as a flash... Donovan Bailey, the 100m world champion, gives reporters his view of last year's events in Gothenburg

Positive drug tests up by 15 per cent

John Duncan

IN A week when drug abuse in sport has again come to the fore, the Sports Council yesterday revealed that drug failures from its testing programme in

the United Kingdom were up by a remarkable 15 per cent over the past year to the highest level on record. "Yes, there have been more positives so far, about 15 per cent," said Michele Verroken, head of the Sports Council's doping control unit and Brit-

ish sport's No. 1 anti-drugs baroness, "but we won't know the exact number until March." With the Leyton Orient footballer Roger Stanislaus attending an FA hearing tomorrow after failing a post-match test for cocaine, Ver-

roken also revealed that sport was seeing more failures for "social" drugs than before. "We've seen increases in all substances listed as banned and we continue to have a high percentage of steroids and a high percentage of stimulants. But I guess if anything the trend is going towards the kind of stimulants that you would expect to see more socially now." That list includes cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines and cocaine.

From April 1994 to April 1995 there were 70 failures from 4,374 samples. The 1995-96 figures are not completed but will go over 80 for the first time, from about 4,000 samples. Whereas steroid detection has remained fairly constant since 1991 at about 30 failures a year, the growth areas in 1994 and 1995 were hallucinogenics (400 per cent increase) and stimulants (200 per cent).

The growth comes at a time of increasing financial pressure on the Sports Council; it conducts about 4,000 tests each year but athletes, some governing bodies and the public are demanding more. Testing each sample costs £130 and the Council has a team of 300 officers collecting samples around the country, each paid up to £50 a day plus expenses. More of the cost of testing should be shifted on to sponsors, said Verroken. If the programme is to maintain its deterrent effect. "We almost need to have that as a condition of sports sponsorship. Quietly sponsors say, 'Of course we don't want to see drugs in sport', but they should be saying it loudly."

The Mats Wilander/Karel Novacek case this week has also tried the legal costs can scare off some testing vigour yesterday issued writs against the International Tennis Federation over their alleged test failures for cocaine at last year's French Open. The ITF said yesterday: "From what we know it [the writ] attacks the whole philosophy of our anti-doping programme. We will be vigorously defending ourselves against any claims."

Drugs in sport are often less sophisticated than people imagine. Verroken keeps in her office a tin of one "muscle building" compound whose main ingredient is skimmed-milk powder. She also tells of the police informing her of a large quantity of cooking oil being sold as testosterone, and an "energy" drink compound that turned out to be talcum powder. The cheats, it seems, sometimes get just what they deserve.



Verroken... record failures

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